

LOCAL NEWS

City Council passes on ticket flap

BY MARK HELFEN
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After five votes that didn't get a majority, the Mountain View City Council decided to leave in place a policy that gives each council member two premium tickets to every performance at the city-owned Shoreline Amphitheater.

But not before bashing the media for raising the perception of a conflict of interest because council members accepted tickets.

The media denunciation caused San Jose Mercury News reporter Julie Patel to stand up at the end of the session and make a brief impromptu speech rejecting the council's criticism Tuesday night.

The lease with Shoreline gives the city 300 general admission tickets spread throughout the year, and 20 premium tickets for each concert. The current council policy, last revised in 1994, gives each council member two free premium tickets for each performance. Council members are requested to return

tickets that will not be used to the city, but they are not required to do so, and some council members give the tickets to other organizations.

According to City Attorney Michael Martello, the policy is consistent with state law and isn't legally a conflict of interest.

Issue surfaced

The issue surfaced when council member Greg Perry suggested a change in the policy, stating that he didn't feel comfortable accepting the tickets. Perry said that he needed to vote on issues affecting Shoreline, and also mentioned the pending lawsuit between the city and Clear Channel Communications Inc. — the current owner of Bill Graham Presents which holds the lease on the amphitheatre.

In the lawsuit, the city accuses Clear Channel of not paying the city the full amount of revenue due under terms of the lease.

During discussion Tuesday, several council members stated that the

issue was overblown, and that there was no conflict of interest. The "media" was described as the root of the controversy, but no specific media sources were listed.

Council member Rosemary Stasek noted that she would be leaving the council after eight years and would not be affected by any change. She said that using the tickets was important for council members to get firsthand information about how the amphitheatre is operated.

"The fact that I've gone to nearly every show over the past eight years has given me a really clear opportunity to see how those folks operate out there," said Stasek. "There has been more than one occasion when they sat in front of us in a study session and said something that I have been able to directly contradict based on my experience with crowd control, alcohol policies, parking, sound levels, you name it."

Stasek said that knowledge was particularly important considering the ongoing lawsuit, since "for the

life of our lease they have been robbing us blind."

"The public perception of us is important. But we can't let what five or 10 people think determine how we do our job," Stasek agreed.

Council member Mike Kasperzak agreed with Stasek

Despite media

"There is no conflict, despite what the media said," said Kasperzak. He said that in the last five months he had received only a single e-mail on the issue.

"People come up to me and ask 'Why is the media doing this,'" said Kasperzak. "Most people think this is part of our compensation, to supplement the \$500 a month we've been paid for the last 20 years."

Mayor Matt Pear agreed that the issue was perception.

"We are addressing a perceived conflict. If that's the issue, let's sell all the tickets," Pear said.

Perry also said the issue was overblown. "I should apologize.

This has turned into far more than I intended it to when I decided to give my tickets away two years ago," said Perry. "In terms of conflict of interest, for me this is relatively far down the list."

"Given what the council has said, leaving things as they are is OK by me," said Perry.

Alternatives were considered that included continuing to distribute the tickets but limit use to the council member or his or her immediate family, having some or all tickets sold with the proceeds going into the city's general fund or copying the policy at the Concord Pavilion. In that city, each council member receives an admission pass to observe the amphitheatre's operation, but not a seat at the concert.

A total of five alternatives were considered and voted on, but none received a majority. Using an admission pass came closest, with a tie vote. Eventually the council decided to move on to the next item of business, leaving the current policy in place.

Bike path and traffic-calming devices to be discussed

The Palo Alto Transportation Division will host a meeting Tuesday to discuss a plan to build a bike path and "traffic-calming" devices on Maybell Avenue and Donald Drive.

During the meeting, city staff will seek input on a potential project on the Maybell/Donald bicycle boulevard project, which would provide a through street where bikes have priority over cars.

The plan includes three speed tables on Maybell Avenue between Thain Way and Abel Street, median islands at the intersections of Maybell Avenue and Coulombe and Amaranta Avenue.

In addition, a speed table would be put on Maybell Avenue between Frandon Court and Maybell Way and on Donald Drive between Maybell Avenue and Arastradero Road.

The area is frequented by many

children since it is close to Juana Briones School, Terman Middle School and Gunn High School.

The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. in Juana Briones School multipurpose room at 4100 Orme St.

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