

County council cancels hearing on proposal to limit tax hikes

Councilors tangle over effort by Madore, probe of allegations



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The Clark County council's Wednesday board meeting was yet another sign that distrust and tension are rampant at the Public Service Center.



A divided Clark County council canceled a public hearing to consider a charter resolution limiting property tax increases. The council also decided to consider hiring an independent firm to investigate Councilor David Madore's recent accusations of illegal wrongdoing by county Community Planning staff.

Both issues prompted bickering between the council's two clear voting blocs. On one side were Chair Marc Boldt, no party preference, and Republican Councilors Jeanne Stewart and Julie Olson. On the other side were Republican Councilors Tom Mielke and Madore.

The council kicked off its meeting with a discussion of a charter amendment proposed by Madore last year that would limit property tax increases to 1 percent a year unless first approved by a vote of the people.

Madore's proposal aligned with state policy that says counties can only raise property tax revenue in individual taxing districts by 1 percent annually. Counties can, however, decide not to raise taxes at all, which allows that increase to be banked and used in following years.

Madore's proposed amendment would have limited Clark County's ability to use its banked capacity — which will sit at 5 percent when the board votes on its levy later this year — unless first approved by a countywide vote. Last September, the council, by a vote of 2-1, adopted a resolution scheduling a hearing on the proposal for March 22. Stewart cast the dissenting vote.

But Olson, Stewart and Boldt had no interest in the charter amendment.

"It is, in my estimation, a diversion," Stewart said.

Madore and Mielke protested the decision.

"I don't understand why you want to make us vulnerable to having that happen," Mielke said of the potential for a 5 percent tax increase.

Boldt, however, said a politician would be "a fool" to raise taxes by that much.

Madore also asked Acting County Manager Mark McCauley why notice hadn't been given for the hearing in *The Reflector*, Clark County's paper of record. McCauley said it was clear from individual conversations with the councilors that the majority of the board was disinterested in the proposal.

"I can count," McCauley said.

"Doesn't that amount to collusion?" Madore retorted, echoing recent accusations Madore has made of the county's top executive.

Allegations discussed

The council also discussed Madore's allegations that Community Planning used a software command to inflate the number of lots created by zoning proposals in the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan update

In a Facebook post, as well as in public meetings, Madore has accused staff of manipulating records to "grossly inflate" the number of developable lots in rural Clark County in order to advocate for an "anti-rural growth agenda" against his Alternative 4 That zoning plan, introduced by Madore, would have allowed some rural property owners to divide their properties into smaller parcels than currently allowed

Deputy Prosecutor Chris Horne suggested that the council could work with an independent firm to investigate Madore's claims, which county planning staff has adamantly denied.

"If a complaint like Councilor Madore's is founded, then discipline (against staff) may well be warranted," Horne said. "If the complaint is unfounded, then the employees or the persons impacted have the right to have their names cleared"

Stewart said the county has a "moral obligation to clear our employees' names."

Madore also has supported an investigation and continued to on Wednesday, but for very different reasons than Stewart

"This is about making sure that our decisions are not harming the citizens based on wrong information," Madore said "This is not about us This is about the citizens being harmed."

Mielke, however, disagreed

"No way," he said. "No way"

"I don't want to carry it that far," he continued "I think you're going to pretty much destroy someone whether they're innocent or guilty"

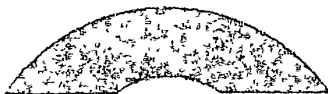
But Boldt and Olson said county staff already have had their reputations affected by the allegations.

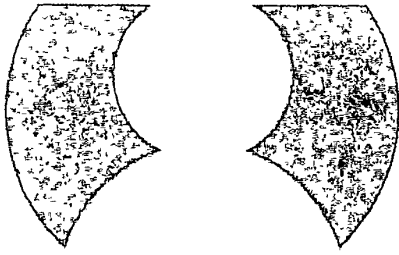
"They've been publicly maligned," Olson said "Their credibility and integrity has been challenged."

Horne noted that Madore's public accusations do not follow county human resource policies for concerns over county staff, possibly creating a liability for the county He asked that Madore keep his complaints "in the normal framework" until the next steps are finalized.

"We'll minimize any damages the county takes on as a result," Horne said.

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