

Insurance software manager, programmer get commission posts

By MARY SCHLEY

A PAIR of residents appointed to two important commissions Tuesday could shake things up a bit, according to Carmel Mayor Dale Byrne, who along with Vice Mayor Bob Delves recommended them for the positions.

“I’m looking at them to take a look at what’s going on in our commissions — not just these two, but all of them — and make recommendations to all of us on what we might do to improve the process,” Byrne told the council Feb. 4 after observing that Mel Ahlborn and Neal Rutta are “process people.”

Byrne and Delves recommended Ahlborn for the planning commission, which Delves left when he was elected



Dale Byrne



Bob Delves

to the council in November 2024, and Rutta for the forest and beach commission, where councilman Hans Buder had a seat until he was elected last fall. They will serve until May 30, 2029, and May 30, 2028, respectively.

“The reason we ended up picking the people we did is because they are very objective,” Byrne explained.

Specialties

Ahlborn, an artist who owns Illumination Studio and has worked as a programmer and multimedia specialist, said in her application that she is “deeply invested in the future of Carmel-by-the-Sea and its unique charms,” and that she wants to “contribute to the thoughtful preservation and development of our community, balancing growth with sustainability and innovation.”

The Mission Street resident said she has worked as an engineer, consultant and programmer “in the fields of aerospace manufacturing; residential, multifamily and commercial real estate management and renovation,

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Sewage plant needs at least \$300 million upgrade

By KELLY NIX

THE BOARD that oversees the Marina wastewater treatment plant took a big step last week toward planning a major upgrade that is expected to cost hundreds of



PHOTO/COURTESY MONTEREY ONE WATER

Monterey One Water’s regional treatment plant, in the center of this photo, needs a major overhaul, but officials say it will cost a pretty penny.

Groups fight over long-vacant Flanders Mansion

By MARY SCHLEY

A PROPOSAL to transform the disused Flanders Mansion into a quasi-residence and event space is facing a counterproposal from longtime supporters of Mission Trail park and Hatton Road residents who envision a more low-key future for the historic building that has been owned by taxpayers since 1972 but has never been put to public use.

Mike Buffo and his Carmel Outlands supporters, including former Mayor Ken White, former councilmen Bobby Richards and Gerard Rose, prior council candidate David O’Neil, and preservation activist Karyl Hall, among others, have been pushing the city to support their concept of transforming the nearly century-old Tudor-style house into “a multi-use cultural hub blending public benefit with private residence functions, educational programs and small community gatherings to increase public engagement.”

‘Weedies’ say no

Their pitches, however, have prompted push-back from the Friends of Mission Trail Nature Preserve — informally known as the Weedies for their organized efforts to remove non-native invasive plants from the park — and residents in the historic mansion’s Hatton Road neighborhood.

Former city councilwoman Karen Ferlito and former assistant city administrator Greg D’Ambrosio, along with more than a dozen other devotees who make up the Friends, said Buffo’s



PHOTO/MIKE BUFFO

Who should be able to enjoy this room and the rest of Flanders Mansion? A nonprofit wants it for a quasi-residence and cultural space, while another group wants it to be a private home.

Boomtown Marina attracts buyers young and old

By CAITLIN CONRAD

MARINA MAY not have gold or silver, but it has water, which can be even more valuable. The precious resource has made the city a boomtown by coastal California standards, with more than 3,000 people moving in over the last 10 years. Which raises the question: Who is moving to Marina?

Real estate agent Kevin Cesario said he’s seen a great diversity in clients looking to buy there, including first-time purchasers, young families, and retirees wanting to downsize.

“I think Marina is going to turn into probably the biggest of all the cities in the area,” said Cesario.

New communities

He may be right. The Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments forecasts Marina will have a population of more than 34,000 by 2050, which would make it the county’s biggest city along the coast and its second largest overall.

The growth has been fueled in large part by the private development of three communities, East Garrison, Sea Haven and The Dunes.

Over the last 10 years, the developer behind The Dunes, Shea Homes, has built and sold 551 homes. The company reports 50 percent of its clients are Monterey County residents, and most are first-time buyers, including young professionals and families with small children, like Rebecca Seldin and her husband, who bought in 2022.

The couple checks all of those boxes. They have two kids under 5 and both work as attorneys, he in Monterey and she in Salinas. Marina was the perfect midpoint for their separate commutes, and The Dunes offered brand-new construction.

“It was more affordable than other areas, and we were getting a house that we knew we wouldn’t have to continue to fix up,” said Seldin.

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RESIDENTS: BATTERY FIRE CAUSED HEALTH PROBLEMS

■ Draws attention from lawyers, activist

By KELLY NIX

PEOPLE WHO live near and far from the fire-damaged Vistra battery plant in Moss Landing have reported symptoms ranging from headaches and eye, nose and throat irritation, to nausea, asthma, congestion and nosebleeds. Their concerns are now being heard by consumer activist and media personality Erin Brockovich.

The Jan. 16 blaze at the Moss Landing facility caused a plume of smoke that carried particulate matter — including heavy metals used in lithium-ion batteries — according to San Jose State researchers who detected the material in soil samples near the plant.

Coughing and nausea

Dozens of people are blaming the fire and smoke for myriad health issues, and they’re sharing their stories on a Facebook page called Moss Landing Power Plant/Vistra Fire Symptoms. The group has nearly 3,500 members.

“I feel like my throat has a bad sunburn,” a female resident and member of the group reported this week. “I’m coughing, short of breath, have nausea and digestion issues. My body feels off. My husband has sore throat, coughing, congested, tired. My son is congested.”

The Prunedale resident dismissed the possibility that a virus might be responsible for the symptoms, suggesting that the fire was to blame. “This is different,” she said.

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