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## McCloskey memo irks E. Palo Altans

By Paul Engstrom  
Staff Writer

Attorney Paul N. "Pete" McCloskey once offered behind-the-scenes support for a brewing recall drive in East Palo Alto and advised recall supporters to get "a gung-ho young black leader" to win more votes from the predominantly black community, according to documents released Friday.

Other documents suggest that some landlords in the city last year violated a rent freeze that was imposed shortly after

East Palo Alto won cityhood on June 7. The city attorney's office is investigating those alleged rent increases and expects to issue its findings in about two weeks, a spokesman said.

In a confidential memorandum to landlord Tom Spieker, McCloskey, a former congressman who is representing incorporation foes in their drawn-out court battle to overturn the cityhood election, offered in-depth advice about setting up an organization to recall a majority of East Palo Alto's five city council members. The memo, dated Oct. 4, 1983, was obtained by

cityhood supporters.

A recall is not currently under way.

McCloskey wrote, "I will be glad to provide free advice and assistance at every step of this procedure, as will my wife and chief campaign expert, Helen Hooper McCloskey. I would highly recommend, however, getting a gung-ho young black leader, male or female, to supervise the whole operation."

City officials in East Palo Alto said Friday that, aside from the racial tone of McCloskey's remark, his memo reveals the extent to which incorporation oppo-

nents might go to uproot the young city. East Palo Alto approved a rent freeze on July 1 and a rent control law on Nov. 23, two measures that have outraged landlords, most of whom are white and fought against cityhood.

Rent control opponents submitted more than 2,300 signatures two weeks ago on petitions to overturn the rent law. Ron Averbart, city clerk in East Palo Alto, will announce Monday whether volunteers were able to gather 840 valid signatures.

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## McCloskey's recall advice angers East P.A. backers

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the minimum needed to qualify the ballot referendum.

"It's just blatant manipulation of the local situation here," Councilman Ruben Abrica said of the memo. "It's planned, manipulated and financed by absentee landlords with direct advice from McCloskey."

Though Abrica and others conceded that, in terms of political strategy, assigning a black to run the recall drive was good advice, they assailed McCloskey for working behind the scenes as a

"political theorist" to guide the fight against City Hall.

"You have McCloskey as an external person deciding to intervene in local community politics — not in an open-door sort of way, but in a confidential memo," said Councilman Omowale Saterwhite. "That's not what I expected of him in terms of his own professional integrity."

On Friday, McCloskey denied that his memo was in any way a racial insult to East Palo Alto. But he acknowledged that race has overshadowed East Palo Alto politics, and said cityhood supporters

have used the issue of race to their own advantage.

"They raise the race issue all the time," he said. "They will use against opponents in East Palo Alto the fact that they are white."

Regarding his remark about finding a "young black leader," McCloskey said: "The reason I suggested that is that 80 percent of the community is black. If anyone is trying to organize a political operation in East Palo Alto, I'd think they would do it with someone who is of the same race as the majority of the people in that community."

His memo also offers detailed suggestions about ways for supporters to organize volunteers and get commitments from voters in each East Palo Alto precinct.

The charges of illegal rent increases involve five East Palo Alto residents, who provided rent receipts and letters from landlords to prove their claims. The rent freeze began July 1 and ended Dec. 23, when the city adopted a substitute law that allows maximum rent increases of 8 percent a year.

It expires July 1, 1984, or when the rent control referendum is decided by voters.

Walter MacRae, a 63-year-old rehabilitation counselor who lives alone in an East Palo Alto studio apartment, said his rent went up from \$350 a month to \$365 on Aug. 1. He said the landlord told him to expect another \$35 boost Feb. 1.

"I believe that they (landlords) were just laughing at the law," MacRae said. "People are moving out of here like the boat is sinking."

Tesfaye Tsadik, whose Oakland law firm is representing East Palo Alto as its city attorney, said his office began investigating the alleged rent hikes about two weeks ago.