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Council absentees concern officials in East Palo Alto

Times Tribune staff

Two East Palo Alto City Council members have missed seven or more meetings during the past two months, hampering progress at recent city government meetings, Mayor Barbara Mouton said last week.

Councilwoman Gertrude Wilks said the reason she has been absent is that she "didn't feel safe" at the meetings. She said potential harassment and an overall "unproductive" atmosphere have discouraged her from attending.

Councilman Omowale Satterwhite injured his back Jan. 20 and has been unable to attend every meeting except one since then.

Wilks has missed nine of 13 meetings since Jan. 1, including all City Council and Planning Agency meetings in February.

Wilks claims she has been threatened and harassed after council meetings because she frequently votes against the majority council opinion.

She received a bomb threat at the Gertrude Wilks Academy early in February, and since then, "I haven't felt safe," she said.

Wilks also said council meetings are a "waste of my time" because no "real discussion" takes place.

She said she expects to attend more now that a new city manager

has arrived, bringing "some sense to the meetings."

"I don't mind being the minority vote on most things," Wilks said, "but the bread-and-butter things we need to deal with — like crime — are not even being talked about."

Satterwhite injured his back the weekend of Jan. 20, and since then he has missed seven of eight City Council and Planning Agency meetings. He attended the meeting on Feb. 14.

Satterwhite was expected to attend last Tuesday night's meeting, but he told the city clerk before the meeting he had reinjured his back and would be absent again.