

New faces on East Palo Alto panel

Rent control board changes

By Mary T. Fortney
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Two landlords who have fought East Palo Alto's rent control law since its inception four years ago are new members of the city's Rent Stabilization Board.

Anthony Horwath and Robert A. Saunders were appointed to the board by the City Council in a reshuffling of the makeup of the board, which administers the rent control ordinance.

The first meeting of the new board is scheduled at 7 p.m. tonight

at 2415 University Ave.

Saunders is chairman of the Palo Alto Park Association, a group of East Palo Alto apartment owners that has pushed over the years to eliminate rent controls in the city. Saunders and the two Horwath brothers, Anthony and Joe, are plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the city in connection with provisions of the rent ordinance.

"Clearly, there is strong feeling by some people on the rent board against Saunders and the Horwaths," said Vice Mayor Warnell Coats. "One of the ways to defuse

the conflicts between the city and property owners is to make them part of the process.

"These people have legitimate interests in our community. The sooner we make them a part of the process, the sooner the bickering stops and the sooner we can get on with positive action."

But Carlos Romero, outgoing chairman of the rent board, charged, "Some political favors needed to be repaid.

"We are looking at the appointment of Horwath and Saunders as a transgression that could impact

negatively on the rent ordinance," he said. "We don't want to act too precipitately, but in the next few weeks we may come up with some sort of protest."

He indicated the protest could be a letter, a lawsuit or an effort to get an initiative petition to remove the rent board from under control of the City Council.

Saunders acknowledged some segments of the community will question whether he and Horwath can approach the job of adminis-

Please see RENT, A-4

RENT

Continued from A-3

tering the rent ordinance in an objective way.

"Some people won't be convinced unless we take the leftist party line prevailing for the last five years," he said. "We're not about to do that. We are charged by law to administer things in a fair and proper manner."

Appointments to the rent board were made at a special meeting Tuesday, when the council also considered appointments to the Planning Commission.

The city attorney had ruled that the terms had expired for all members of the rent board except Louise Jones.

The council decided not to reappoint Romero, Brian Sylvia, Frederick Holbrook, Richard Reyes and Michael Palm to the board. Another member, Henry Franklin, had resigned.

Five new appointments were made to the seven-member board, which includes three tenant representatives, two homeowners and two landlords. In addition, there are three alternates.

Horwath and Saunders will represent landlords; David Henderson and Richard C. Henry, tenants; and Edrick Haggans and Jones, home-

owners. One more tenant representative and the three alternates still need to be appointed.

Saunders said the new board tonight will elect officers, consider a change in registration fees for landlords, introduce for consideration some changes in regulations and set a time and day for regular meetings of the board.

He stressed no action would be taken on the registration fees or regulations until after public hearings were held.

The old rent board had voted in May to increase the registration fee paid by landlords from \$38 a unit to \$50, effective July 1. However, that vote is believed to be invalid because it was taken after

the members' terms had expired.

Income from the registration fees is used to administer the rent control program.

The Palo Alto Park Association several times has approached the city with proposals to support affordable housing in exchange for relief from what members feel are too stringent rent controls.

The Horwath brothers last October were charged by the rent board with allegedly overcharging one of their tenants \$6,112 in rents over a 3½-year period. Romero also said the Horwaths had owed \$4,000 in registration fees and about \$10,000 in penalties. He said the brothers had paid the fees but were appealing the penalties.