

# Reactionary Minority Struggles to Keep Power on City Council

Speech to Santa Cruz City and Council by Robert Norse 10-8-19

**City Manager Martin Bernal** without perhaps meaning to do so has become a powerful and dictating institution and influence. He and his staff heads every Wednesday before City Council meeting meet behind closed doors with the Mayor to preset the agenda. Over the years, they have prioritized the *Seaside Company, the Downtown Association, Santa Cruz Neighbors, the Police Department*, real estate and developer interests and expanding their bureaucracy..

Renters, students, workers, the disabled, the elderly and the homeless have taken last place. For the homeless, the Bernal's staff has solicited state and federal moneys and used them to support limited and preferential services for a favored few. Reactionary Council members regularly shift blame to state and county authorities for the flood of people sleeping in doorways.

**Councilmembers Watkins and Mathews** prefer to discuss, plan and concoct endless timetables, goals, and procedures, rather than take substantive actions. When a newly elected Progressive majority moves to act on long-delayed promises, they grow alarmed.

For homeless folks locally, The key issues are shelter, services, and equal treatment under the law. City Councils under Watkins and Mathews and those before them have delayed, ignored, and masked the City's failure to address these issues. Through **Assistant City Manager Susie O'Hara**, they've created a false narrative claiming the City is prudently and adequately addressing the snowballing situation. .

So when Krohn and Glover come along with a potential new majority, seeking to stop a library dismemberment, address the forbidden third rail of just eviction protection and rent control, and seek to democratize City Council procedure, the Watkins-Bernal minority adopts a new strategy: Keep their items off the agenda, cut off staff access, cut back public comment. Then when Councilmembers object and expose these subterfuges the whistleblowers are gaslighted as "uncivil" "rude"...and now "censurable: and "recall-worthy".

Real reform must go further than censure. It has to start with the replacement of the City Manager and the department heads...unelected, powerfully paid, unaccountable city officials without oversight. And the creation of a regular oversight process. The City Attorney also has become a key player. An increasingly authoritarian Mayor called on him for helpful rulings. This is on top of interrupting Councilmembers, refusing to recognize others, confuse wavering Council members, &, if necessary, throw matters into closed session, which further gags the progressive majority.

Councilmembers **Krohn and Glover** themselves and their allies are not without blame. By not holding public meetings, press conferences, and taking independent action to educate the community, they essentially allow themselves—and their constituents to be muzzled. Frivolous recall and censure actions, loud cries of "uncivil" when the staff's claims are challenged are the new strategy. . The most fundamental and glaring issues remain untouchable and unaddressed. Sprawling homelessness, renter exploitation, blatant misappropriation of police and ranger resources, selective use of ordinances. "Incivility" is code accusation to punish outspoken frustration and honest exposure of the forbidden issues. The Sentinel and conservative media colludes in the hubbub, and the real issues remain buried.

The community must move the issues with direct action, protest, mass rallies, press conferences, and the kind of civil resistance that produced real change in the 30s and 60's. We can learn from Extinction Rebellion [ER] protests, teachers unions organizing, and UAW strikes.

ER uses direction action to get truth in government, adult conversation direct democracy, and debt repudiation & zero carbon emissions by 2025. Let's learn from them.