

School trustee is theft suspecting removal of campaign sign

by Robb Fulcher

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Police identified city school board member Lance Widman as a petty-theft suspect after a videotaped escapade in which he removed a “No on Measure A” campaign sign from a public park. Three decades ago Widman — then a Hermosa Beach city councilman — served six months probation after taking down campaign signs.

Widman, 61, who teaches political science at El Camino College and operates the private South Bay Center for Dispute Resolution, has not been charged with a crime, but the matter has been referred to the city prosecutor’s office.

Widman shrugged off the incident and said the campaign sign at the tiny Edith Rodaway Park on Prospect Avenue and Gentry was illegally put up in the first place, a contention that is supported by the Hermosa Beach Municipal Code. The sign urged a no vote on Hermosa Beach Measure A, a school construction bond measure that Widman supports.

Videotape footage shot by “No on A” supporter Jacklynn Tagliafarro shows Widman walking away from the park about 8 a.m. Monday, carrying a campaign sign folded in half. In the shaky videotape, shot from the passenger seat of an auto driven by a friend of Tagliafarro, Widman is seen walking toward his house which is near the park, noticing the camera, smiling and waving at Tagliafarro, then going inside.

Tagliafarro said she had duct-taped the campaign sign to the fence an hour earlier, then lay in wait with her friend to catch Widman, who she suspected of removing “No on A” campaign signs.

“The campaign’s been so dirty,” she said. Each election season candidates and campaigners report signs being illegally removed, or “sniped” as campaign veterans call it. Each political season also features political signs illegally placed on public property.

Widman readily acknowledged removing the “No on A” campaign sign, and said he has taken down other campaign signs from public property as well.

“To me they’re illegally posted signs and they’re fair game,” Widman said.

About the accusation of theft, Widman said, “What do you do once you take them down? You have to take them somewhere. I have a friend who just tears them in half and stuffs them in a trashcan.”

Police officers and city public works employees remove signs from public property when the violation is called to their attention, then return the signs to their owners, police said.

“I should pay a public employee to clean up the stupidity of someone else?” Widman said. “No.”

Tagliafarro filed a police report about the incident, and an officer went to Widman’s home. At the officer’s request Widman brought the sign to the police station.

Police issued a press release describing Widman as a suspect in a petty theft, which carries a maximum punishment of a \$1,000 fine and six months in jail.

“The members of the “No on A” campaign who witnessed the theft of their sign have filed a crime report alleging the theft and naming Lance Widman as the observed suspect,” HBPD Sgt. Paul Wolcott said. “The videotape has been booked as evidence. A follow-up investigation is being conducted by detectives of the Hermosa Beach Police Department.”

In the 1970s, Widman said, he and fellow Hermosa Councilman Hank Doerfling “decided to do some sniping” and went to Torrance to remove offending signs advertising the opponent of Assembly candidate Chip Post of Hermosa.

A Torrance police officer approached the two and they each produced a badge identifying themselves as mayor of Hermosa, Widman said. The mayoralty rotates among sitting council members.

“He had his old mayor’s badge,” Widman said. “The trouble was, I was mayor at the time.”

Widman said he was placed on six months probation following the incident, and the offense was erased from his

record after the probation was served.

Current Hermosa council members are not issued badges, but Widman said the incident involving him did not cause the badges to be scrapped. ER

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