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Sellers is keeping his eye on issues

Ex-city attorney remains involved from other side

By Sue Davis

Former City Attorney Mark Sellers may have left Thousand Oaks public office, but he's not out of the game.

Sellers, who left his post in January 2004, is still up on every aspect of Thousand Oaks city politics and planning.

"I do miss it," Sellers, 56, said at his Westlake Village law office. "The enjoyable part was working with the public and trying to help the council get where they want to go."

Sellers was city attorney in Thousand Oaks for almost 20 years, shepherding the city through much of its growth.

He proudly points to the Civic Arts Plaza, the Teen Center, Goebel Senior Adult Center, the Dos Vientos development and the open-space ring around the city as projects he worked on.

He now specializes in land-use law and in government relations for the firm of Jackson DeMarco Tidus Peckenpaugh in Westlake Village. He also will teach law at Pepperdine University.

He said private practice has taken some getting used to. For one thing, he has to remember to bill customers, something that he didn't have to do at the city.

Another difference is the high-tech nature of a large law office.

He pointed out computer ports built into a conference table and tele-conference equipment.

"At the city, when we had a meeting, it was 'Are we meeting on the second floor or the third?'" he said. "We didn't have any of this."

Sellers said the challenges of working for the city were in trying to help council members and the public understand legal issues.

"You have to worry about how to deliver the message rather than just the content," Sellers said. "You can't just say 'The law doesn't permit that.' You have to use language the public can understand."

Community development director John Prescott said simplifying legalese was one of Sellers' strong points.

"He had a way of being able to take complex legal issues and put them into

context and a style of language that simplified it for the non-legal minds in the room,” said Prescott.

Sellers said he sees some big issues facing Thousand Oaks city government.

“They have to decide what to do about a new city manager, first of all,” he said. “If you get the right person, that person plants all kinds of seeds and stimulates all sorts of discussion.”

He said the city manager decision is crucial because that person can determine priorities and provide direction that allows city staff to get things done.

He sees the destiny of Thousand Oaks Boulevard as being of prime importance, saying that the city needs creative solutions to the problem of a long street without a true focal point.

“The Lakes development on the east side of the Civic Arts Plaza should help bring people in,” he said. “Now the city might begin looking at the property to the west.”

Council member Dennis Gillette agreed.

“Thousand Oaks Boulevard, as it has since October 1964, will remain a topic of extensive discussion,” Gillette said. “Periodically we’ve done all kinds of studies -- we have done lots and will do more.”

Sellers said he will work with the Thousand Oaks Boulevard Property Owners Association to improve the area.

Sellers represents clients in Thousand Oaks, sometimes coming before the same council days he once sat behind.

Sellers said there is one part of the job he won’t miss.

“No more Tuesday night meetings until 2 a.m.,” he said, smiling.

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