

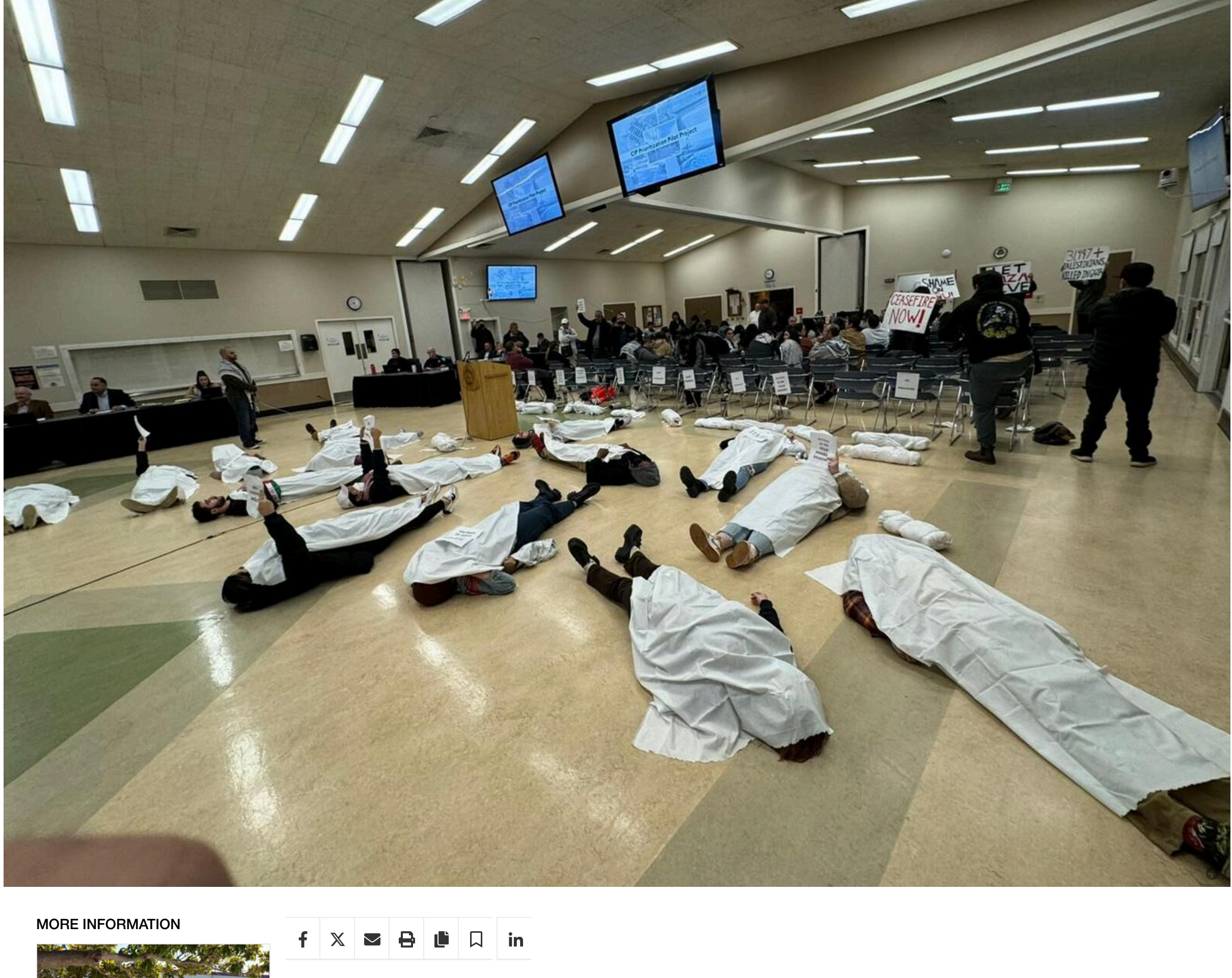
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Cease-fire resolution calls remain in San Bruno

Recent City Council meeting scene of resident dissent and protest

By Holly Rusch, Daily Journal staff
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The San Bruno City Council never got a chance to settle into its Jan. 23 meeting to discuss matters such as parking meter installation and the budget as scores of residents showed their interest in a cease-fire resolution that was voted down earlier in the month.

“The residents of this city will not forget the betrayal we feel today. And now, we must sever our trust in all of you,” said a man who identified himself as Gus S., the last speaker at an hourlong public comment for items not on the agenda Jan. 23. “By turning your back on this community’s resolution, you have turned your back on the people you swore to serve and now we have no choice but to turn our backs to you.”

With those words, the around 70-person audience — which spoke almost solely on the topic of a cease-fire resolution — physically turned their back on the City Council and chanted. They remained with their backs to them for the remaining two-hour duration of the meeting.

The actions stemmed from Councilmember Tom Hamilton’s motion to agendize a resolution calling for a permanent bilateral cease-fire resolution in Gaza and the release of all hostages Jan. 9. The motion failed 2-2 with one absence, a move that members of the crowd of around 250 people, many Palestinian Americans who live in San Bruno, promised they would not forget.

On Jan. 23, however, the council’s agenda included typical city business including a presentation on capital improvement projects, the budget process and an informational item on new parking meters downtown.

Police Chief Ryan Johansen presented an update on the addition of metered parking downtown with audience members turned away from the council, noting that while pay-by-hour parking kiosk installation began in November 2023, the city is having issues getting the meters online. Placing bags over the kiosks to demonstrate paid parking was not active inadvertently resulted in disruption to solar panels, he said.

Downtown parking will have an initial rate of \$1.50 an hour from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. with a two-hour limit — businesses will get two free owner/employee permits. Off-street lots will be \$1 for two hours, \$2 for five hours and \$3 for 10 hours. Street parking is free overnight and residents may park in city lots free from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m., officials said.

As the city began its last two items, a presentation on capital improvement projects and approval of the 2024-25 budget process, individuals laid on the ground between the council dais and the audience with sheets covering their bodies. The demonstration was a representation of the ongoing violence and death in Gaza affecting the families of San Bruno residents, organizers said.

Nick Pegueros, the city’s chief financial officer, introduced the timeline for capital improvement projects, which began last fall, as well as new proposed specific categories for projects to be organized as the “die-in” continued. At the January City Council retreat, councilmembers will talk about upcoming CIP projects, as well as strategic budget initiatives. City officials allowed the people with sheets over them to remain through the remainder of the meeting.

Councilmember Marty Medina, who voted yes to place a cease-fire resolution on the agenda, told the group at the end of the Jan. 23 meeting that it “really doesn’t make sense” to bring another, similar cease-fire resolution forward unless a third vote is confirmed.

Mayor Rico Medina and Councilmember Sandy Alvarez voted no and Vice Mayor Michael Salazar was absent for the vote, and only if one of them expressed an interest would it be prudent for a resolution to be re-agendized, Marty Medina said.

Salazar was absent at the original vote due to COVID-19, he said, and attempted to read a statement to the crowd at the Jan. 23 meeting but was booed down. He said in an interview that he does not see a resolution being re-agendized in an iteration the community supports.

“Being that the speaking points that the community was asking for I still believe were not within our purview, a version of a document that I think would be supported is generally not what the community wants, I don’t see it coming back,” he said.

In response to the common criticism from cease-fire resolution supporters that San Bruno raised the Ukrainian flag twice, creating a precedent for the local government to comment on foreign affairs, Salazar said that the resolution was much more limited in scope and was an “offer of solidarity” without taking a position on the conflict. He acknowledged that the decision had created a potentially overreaching precedent.

“That statement that we made by raising the flag probably was something that went beyond, maybe where we should have been reaching. It’s hard to say whether looking back, maybe it would have been best not to even dip into that,” Salazar said.

Rico Medina drew anger from meeting attendees who derided his decision to attend a Jan. 22 vigil for peace and attempt to issue a proclamation of his own, to acknowledge community suffering and the need for humanitarian aid in Gaza. He said in an interview he was originally told by one person the Palestinian community would be open to such a proclamation, and his attendance at the vigil was not related to any presentation of such a proclamation.

Councilmember Sandy Alvarez was also under fire at the council meeting for her statement at the Jan. 23 meeting, in which she referenced the ongoing crisis in Gaza as “temporary” and said she could not support a resolution that “may result in long-term disagreement between the two groups in our community.”

“Temporary? Temporary? San Bruno residents stood at this very podium and testified to having lost family members during the siege on Gaza. Is the killing of children something we must accept as a society because it is temporary? Councilmember Alvarez, death is permanent,” a woman who identified herself as Amena said.

Alvarez maintained in an interview that the goal of the council was to prevent division on issues out of local government purview.

“None of the people here caused the war, we didn’t cause the killing, we didn’t cause the war,” she said, in reference to comments that the council had caused a racist division in the community due to their decision. “None of us wanted the killing to continue, so for the division to happen in this community just because we did not approve a cease-fire resolution is sad to hear.”

The movement for cease-fire resolutions has been throughout the Bay Area, and were passed in Oakland, Richmond and San Francisco. A proposal for one to support a cease-fire and the release of all hostages and for humanitarian aid at the Dec. 18 Foster City Council meeting requested by Councilmember Sam Hindi did not receive support from any other councilmember.

Still, San Bruno residents voiced overarching frustration that councilmembers were not meeting the needs of their community throughout the meeting.

“We stand here before you today with a deep sense of anger and sadness that permeates our community. We, the residents, had placed our trust in this council, believing that you would act in the best interests of the people you represent,” Eleni Katout said at public comment. “Your failure to support the community’s resolution calling for a cease-fire has left us disillusioned and disheartened.”

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