

# TUCSON REGION

## Developers held fundraisers for Trasoff, Uhlich

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Two developers who are negotiating to acquire \$4 million of city property held fundraisers for two City Council members just weeks before a council vote on the deal.

A May 29 fundraiser for Councilwoman Nina Trasoff was sponsored by partners Scott Stiteler and Don Martin, along with another developer, Jim Campbell, who is negotiating his own Downtown deal.

Both Martin and Trasoff, who is seeking re-election this fall, said they didn't know how much money was raised. Campaign finance reports for that time period are not yet available.

Martin also held a fundraiser for Councilwoman Karin Uhlich on April 16 that raised \$550, in addition to the \$820 he and his wife had previously given Uhlich's re-election effort.

Campbell's agreement, which calls for the city to finance a public parking garage on his property, comes to the council for a final vote on Tuesday.

Stiteler's and Martin's development agreement comes up for final approval June 16, and the two previously met with the council last Tuesday, three days after the fundraiser.

The city and developers have been negotiating since December.

The Stiteler/Martin proposal calls for the city to give the developers \$4 million worth of city properties in exchange for guarantees they will promptly complete the commercial development of properties they already own and spend \$5 million on affordable housing and Downtown community groups.

Campbell needs the city to build a \$3 million parking garage on East Congress Street, across from the former Greyhound site, where he plans 104 units for

University of Arizona students and more than 46,000 square feet of shops, bars and a gym.

Trasoff, Uhlich and Martin all said the donations were aboveboard, adding that politicians need to raise money in order to compete in and win elections. The Democratic council members said they would never allow a political donation to influence their decisions.

However, opponents of Trasoff and Uhlich blasted the fundraisers.

Steve Kozachik, a Republican challenging Trasoff, said the fundraiser "smacks of Chicago-style pay-to-play politics."

"There's no place for that in this city," Kozachik said. "It's inappropriate."

Green Party candidate Dave Croteau said he's opposed to developers influencing election races.

Ben Buehler-Garcia, who's running against Uhlich, said he wouldn't have attended the fundraiser to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. "I would not have had that fundraiser," the Republican said.

Trasoff said the developers held the fundraiser because she has been working 50 to 60 hours a week for three and half years to help revitalize Downtown, and her hard work "made this revitalization" possible.

She said it's campaign season and it doesn't matter if she held the fundraiser before the vote or waited until afterward. She probably would have been criticized either way. "It would be seen like a game and dishonest if I said I would hold off and let's do it later," Trasoff said.

She pointed out she asked Stiteler to make several changes to his plans at the June 2 study session, changes that she said Stiteler was unhappy about.

Uhlich said she has contacted every major Democratic donor in Southern Arizona for contributions, including Martin, who then offered to put on a fundraiser for her.

"Don fully understands contributions to my campaign in no way affect how I vote," Uhlich said.

Martin said he threw fundraisers for the two council members because they are solid leaders who have done a good job for the community. He called "pay-to-play" accusations rude, irresponsible and insulting.

Stiteler referred calls to Martin.

"It's a cheap shot," Martin said.

Campbell said he agreed to co-host the fundraiser at Martin's request. He said it was the first time he did something like that, and he agreed because Trasoff has made good decisions for the east end of Downtown, particularly on the plans for the Fourth Avenue Underpass.

David E. Frulla, a partner in the Washington, D.C.-based law firm of Kelley Drye & Warren, said the donations aren't illegal under Arizona law if they were under the \$410 limit. Frulla is an expert in campaign finance and political law.

However, he noted 10 states and several big cities, including New York, have passed laws preventing the donation from public contractors to prevent "the appearance or the actuality that political largess is influencing government decisions."

And three states require public contractors to register as such so their citizens can better track "pay-to-play" efforts, Frulla said.

Steve Caulk, a Colorado lobbyist with the public relations firm ProConnect, said donations like those to Trasoff and Uhlich would be illegal in Colorado under a constitutional amendment passed last year by voters.