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Councilwoman hit Microsoft in the soft spot

- Mtn. View official accused of threatening Microsoft

BY [MIKE CASSIDY](#)
Mercury News

This is rich: The world's most powerful corporation whining about being bullied by the world's smallest city council member.

You've no doubt heard of Microsoft, which in recent years has opened a Silicon Valley campus and jabbered a great deal about becoming a leading corporate citizen here. You maybe haven't heard of Rosemary Stasek, a Mountain View city councilwoman who has made affordable housing her issue.

The two have gotten into a spat. Robyn Holst, a local Microsoft government affairs manager, said in a public meeting recently that Stasek has threatened to criticize at every opportunity Microsoft's decision not to contribute to a local housing program.

It was sort of a downer at a meeting called to plan the festivities to commemorate Mountain View's 100th birthday. Holst, it seems, simply wasn't in the centennial spirit. She went on to say that Stasek's promise

was ``extortion basically."

The fight is over the Housing Trust Fund, a joint business, charity and government project led by the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group. The idea is for companies, local government charities and individuals to contribute \$20 million that will be used to help homeless shelters, build below-market-rate housing and secure mortgages for families that otherwise couldn't afford them. The fund is \$1 million short of its goal.

Small, but oh my

Stasek, who stands 5 feet tall, wanted Microsoft to contribute. Microsoft, with annual revenues of \$23 billion, didn't. Stasek later told Holst that she would tell anyone who asked how disappointed she was that Microsoft didn't step up.

``It's my place," she says, ``as a public official, to say, `That doesn't reflect the needs of our community, the community that you are in here, the community you want to be a part of`."

I don't care what you think about Microsoft or housing or whether people who can't afford housing on their own deserve help. And forget for a minute how absurd it is to think of Microsoft being pushed around by a small-town city council member, or a city council or even a federal judge. This is a company that has crushed entire companies and conquered entire industry segments.

Think about what's going on here. Stasek, a Web developer who is running for the state Assembly, is an elected official with an agenda. She pushes her agenda in a get-to-know-you meeting with a new corporate citizen. She says the corporate citizen should contribute to solving one of her city's most vexing problems.

The corporate citizen decides otherwise. Stasek vows to criticize the decision. This is not exactly a Chicago-style shakedown.

Now, Microsoft is complaining about being bullied and Mountain View Mayor Mario Ambra is criticizing Stasek and asking other council members whether there should be an investigation.

She's right

And me? I think Stasek is doing exactly what the citizens of Mountain View pay her to do.

No, she doesn't get to tell Microsoft how to spend its billions. In fact, Microsoft says it has giving guidelines that tip heavily toward improving technology for those in need. To that end, in 1999 the company donated more than \$20 million in cash and goods locally.

For that, Stasek says, the company should be commended. But, she adds, if she thinks the new kid in town could do better by its neighbors she is going to say so.

Yes, Stasek told Holst she would speak out. But, Stasek says, only after Microsoft had declined to contribute to the housing fund. (A Microsoft spokeswoman said Holst was traveling and in meetings all day Wednesday and would not be available to present her side.)

And Stasek said she is not actively lining up speaking engagements to bash Microsoft. In Silicon Valley, she jokes, it would be hard to be heard above the grumbling.

``How could I get a word in edgewise?''

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