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Desert Hot Springs police pulled into political sign fight

Tenant vs. owner rights raised in Desert Hot Springs dustup



Adam Sanchez's children, Laila and Adam Jr., put their father's campaign sign back on a property in Desert Hot Springs. / Submitted by Adam Sanchez

DESERT HOT SPRINGS — A political battle over a campaign sign ventured into a tenant rights versus the property owner’s Friday.

Mayoral candidate and Councilman Adam Sanchez walked into the Desert Hot Springs police station Friday and filed a complaint against a landlord who had an “Adam for Mayor” campaign sign removed from his tenant’s lawn in the 13960 block of Cactus Avenue.

Sanchez said the tenant gave Sanchez permission to put the sign in the yard. However, property owner Anthony Santillo said he wanted signs from Sanchez’s political opponent, incumbent Desert Hot Springs Mayor Yvonne Parks, on the lawn instead.

“I own the property and support Yvonne,” said Santillo, a Los Angeles area resident, who according to public records owns nine residential properties in Desert Hot Springs. “I did say to make sure Yvonne could place her signs on all my properties. She’s done a good job for the community.”



“I am the owner of the property, and I have a right to do what I want on it,” Santillo added.

Parks concurred with the landlord, saying “the property owner chose to take the sign down... they wanted our signs. The property owner is the ultimate decision-maker. I believe in the property owner’s right.”

Adam Sanchez talks to a police officer Friday about the removal of his political sign from a home where the occupant allegedly agreed on its placement, but the owner refused. / Reza Gostar, The Desert Sun

State Assembly Bill 337, which amended 1940.4 of the Civil Code when it passed in September 2011, prohibits landlords from barring “a tenant from posting or displaying political signs relating to an election or legislative vote, the initiative, referendum, or recall process, or issues before a public body for a vote, except under certain circumstances.”

However, the ordinance is not a blank check. Under certain circumstances, such as the size of the sign or violation of local laws, a landlord can prohibit certain political signs from being placed. Also, there is a reasonable time clause, which stipulates signs can only be placed “at least 90 days prior to the date of the election or vote to which the sign relates and end at least 15 days following the date of the election or vote.”

Political signs are exempt under Desert Hot Springs’ local sign ordinance. The election is Nov. 5.

The sign was taken down once before, Sanchez said. He drove by last week and noticed it had vanished.

“I asked the tenant if she knew what happened to the sign, but she had no idea,” he said.

He replaced the sign, then received the following email from property manager Toni Ramirez, which included the landlord's name and phone number:

“I am for the mayor Yvonne Parks. I let them put up sign on property then your sign appears again on property. Please, remove your sign or I will throw away again by 8 a.m. Friday or I will throw away again. Please keep off my property.”

Sanchez said that when he went to the house about 8 a.m., Ramirez was in the process of removing his political street marker.

“She took it down and laid it on the ground ... She also asked me if ‘I had the tenant’s permission.’ We both walked to the tenant’s home but she was at work,” Sanchez said.

Ramirez said that the “tenant never gave Sanchez permission.” The tenant could not be reached for comment.

Desert Hot Springs police officers — after consulting with the Riverside County District Attorney’s Office — returned Sanchez’s missing sign, which they picked up from Ramirez. Sanchez placed the sign back on Cactus Avenue.

Ramirez said late Friday that she would contact the police and notify them the sign was placed there without the tenant’s permission. She also said that none the Santillo’s nine properties have signs supporting Sanchez.