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A Nichols' Worth: If we're talking morals, let's talk Strodtman

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Friday, August 15, 2008

By [Josh Nichols](#)

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Mark Strodtman was indicted by a Weld County grand jury in March under the Colorado Organized Crime Control Act for racketeering, among 22 other felonies.

There is a warrant out for his arrest through the FBI for unlawful flight to avoid prosecution, and the FBI is offering an award for his capture.

He's on the Web site for "America's Most Wanted."

Strodtman is accused of being the mastermind of a major mortgage fraud scheme that enabled homebuyers to purchase properties they otherwise never could have afforded. In the scheme, Strodtman is accused of inflating buyers' incomes and assets and falsely verifying buyers' rents and employment. Homebuyers purchased their homes unaware of the fact that their information had been falsified. Several of those homes have since been foreclosed upon.

In a nutshell, he's accused of screwing over a lot of people – and now he's believed to be sucking cocktails

Event Calendar

August 2008

S	M	T	W	T
27	28	29	30	31
3	4	5	6	7
10	11	12	13	14
17	18	19	20	21
24	25	26	27	28
31	1	2	3	4

somewhere in Mexico as a fugitive of the law.

Interestingly enough, when a proposal came before the Grand Junction Planning Commission in May to rezone Orchard Mesa property owned by Strodtman, the Grand Junction Planning Commission approved it.

Strodtman's company, The Shores LLC, had petitioned the city for annexation to build a subdivision on 17 acres.

The commission approved it; even after Free Press reporter Sharon Sullivan had reported in these pages what Strodtman had been accused of doing in Weld County and the fact that he was a fugitive of the law.

Senior Planner Lori Bowers at the time explained why Strodtman's history had no impact on city staff's review of the proposal, and explained why staff recommended that the Planning Commission approve it.

"My job is to review the documents presented to me and make sure they meet code requirements," Bowers said. "A person's character has nothing to do with it."

She went on to say:

"People have a judicial right to develop and the city has no laws to run background checks on someone."

I never questioned staff's decision to recommend approval, or the Planning Commission's decision to approve the application.

If an applicant follows the rules of the planning process, if their proposal fits with the zoning of the area – the proposal should be approved.

Using the fact that a person involved in the application is a wanted fugitive would be stepping out of the bounds of a planning commission's duty. Just let the cops and the reporters flush out the dirt bags, while planners worry about zoning and codes.

That's how I understood the process to work, until this week.

Four members of the Grand Junction Planning Commission set a new precedent Tuesday night.

Those commission members voted against a plan presented by a Kevin Eardley to open a gentleman's club – basically, a place where there will be naked women dancers.

Commission members didn't vote against it because the permit sought by the applicant wasn't consistent with the growth plan.

They didn't vote against it because zoning and development codes hadn't been met.

They didn't vote against it because professional staff recommended they vote against it.



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Nope, they voted against it simply because they didn't want to vote in favor of a club where women dance naked.

If four commissioners did what they believed to be morally right by voting against a proposed gentleman's club, it seems voting against a proposal by an accused crook would have been the morally correct thing to do, too.

If the Planning Commission is taking it upon itself to protect us taxpayers from something, why don't they protect us from a developer who's likely to swindle a loved one out of money? If they think they need to protect us, I'd rather they protect us from that than protect us from an establishment that we all have an individual choice of stepping inside.

Next time they approve a plan of a man suspected of exploiting innocent people, the commission members no longer have the luxury of throwing their arms in the air and saying, "We're just following the process."

Because they've established themselves as moral decision making board, "just following the process" in cases like that of Mark Strodtman seems like a pretty immoral thing to do.

Josh Nichols is managing editor of the Grand Junction Free Press. Reach him at editor@gjfreepress.com.

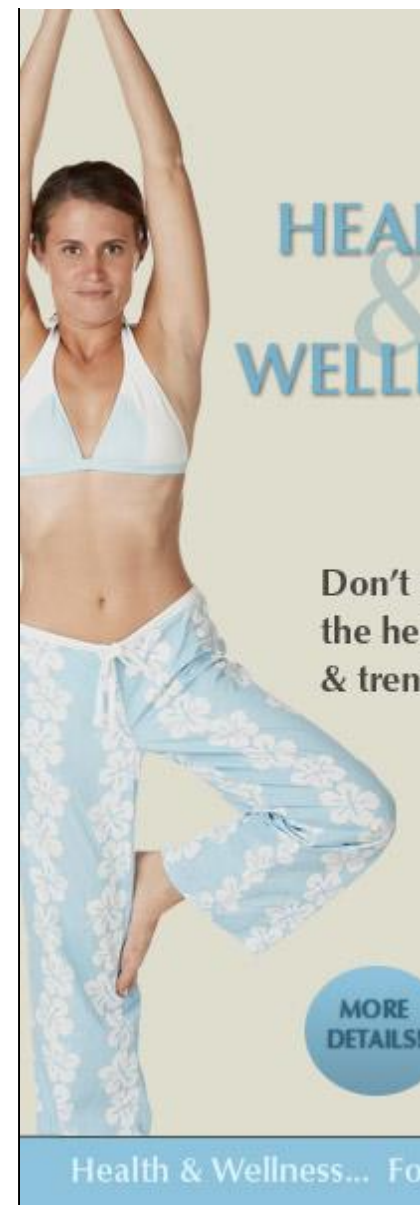
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