

by Mike Dinsdale

A couple are outraged at an attack on them by Whangarei's mayor after they suggested he winked at a property developer.

In a letter to the *Northern Advocate*, Whangarei ratepayer Pat Slater suggested Stan Semenoff had winked at a property developer at the conclusion of

a meeting in which the sale of Whangarei District Council land was approved to a group led by developer Wayne Hill.

She wrote that she presumed "the wink you gave at the very end ... was not for anyone but Wayne Hill sitting in your line of sight. What did that mean?"

Mr Semenoff has taken umbrage and legal advice over the suggestion.

He then responded in a letter to the *Northern Advocate*, saying he did not wink and attacking the Slaters as a negative couple.

"It is a shame that in the brief time they have lived in our district that they have not found more positive things to do with their time."

Mrs Slater and husband Warren — a former mayoral candidate — are unimpressed, as is former Whangarei district councillor Robin Lieferring, who wrote to the *Advocate* suggesting Mr Semenoff was "playing the man, not the ball".

Contrary to Mr Semenoff's suggestion that they spent most of their time being negative, Mr and Mrs Slater say they volunteer with the Parkinson's Society and had been involved with the Save the Harbour group and march, including building the group's website.

The couple attend most council meetings and consider themselves "watchdogs". They believe



ANGRY: Pam and Warren Slater are unimpressed at the suggestion they have "nothing better to do".

PICTURE / JOHN STONE

Mr Semenoff is trying to stifle criticism.

Mrs Lieferring said the mayor's response was insulting.

Criticism was part and parcel of the job as a politician, she said.

"... It is time he [Mr Semenoff] learned that to insult the Slater family shows ignorance of his duty to uphold a standard of decency expected of a mayor."

Mr Semenoff said he had answered "Mrs Slater's insinuation in an appropriate manner" after taking legal advice and was not trying to stifle anything.

"I merely put the record straight."

Mr Semenoff said Mrs Lieferring publicly supported a rival candidate at the last election, while Mr Slater stood against him in the mayoral race.

"I am not at all ignorant that criticism goes with the job, but insinuation and negativity for political purpose goes beyond unbiased criticism ... the Slaters have political ambitions, and that's their democratic right and they can expect their share of criticism in turn."

Mr Slater said as ratepayers, he and his wife felt entitled to criticise decisions they judged were not in the best interests of the district.

The couple were endeavouring to contribute by keeping the council honest.