

United States District Court
For the Northern District of California

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
SAN JOSE DIVISION

PAUL M. CARRICK,)	Case No.: 13-CV-01632-LHK
)	
Plaintiff,)	ORDER GRANTING MOTION TO
)	DISMISS
v.)	
)	
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY)	
ASSESSOR/RECORDER, SEAN SALDAVIA,)	
COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

Plaintiff Paul M. Carrick (“Carrick”) filed this action against Defendants Santa Cruz County Assessor/Recorder Sean Saldavia (“the County Recorder”) ¹ and Santa Cruz County (“the County”) (collectively, “Defendants”). Before the Court is Defendants’ motion to dismiss Carrick’s complaint pursuant to Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6) (“Motion to Dismiss”). Carrick, who is *pro se*, opposes the motion. Having considered the parties’ submissions, the relevant case law, and the record in this case, the Court GRANTS Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss with prejudice.

¹ It is unclear from Carrick’s complaint whether Carrick names two or three County defendants. In the complaint’s caption, Carrick appears to name (1) Santa Cruz County Assessor/Recorder, (2) Sean Saldavia, and (3) County of Santa Cruz. However, in paragraph four of Carrick’s complaint, which is the section that identifies “Parties,” Carrick names two defendants: (1) “Sean Saldavia is Santa Cruz County Assessor/Recorder,” and (2) the County of Santa Cruz. Thus, the Court construes Carrick’s complaint as naming only two defendants.

1 **I. BACKGROUND**

2 **A. Facts²**

3 Carrick alleges that he owns the following real property, including residential buildings,
4 located in Santa Cruz County: Assessor Parcel Numbers 106-011-58, 106-011-25, and 106-011-60.
5 See Complaint (“Compl.”) ¶ 5, ECF No. 1. The three parcels of land cover about 20 acres in Santa
6 Cruz County. See *id.* The land had been granted a patent in 1893 via the Homestead Act. *Id.*
7 Carrick alleges that he developed the property with “roads, irrigation, agriculture, and structures.”
8 See *id.* Carrick also rents out some of the residential buildings within the land to tenants. See
9 Compl. ¶ 10. Carrick alleges that in one of the gates of Carrick’s property, a sign states: “NOTICE
10 This property is Protected by United States Land Patent Number 4889, As recorded in Document
11 1999-0003840 Santa Cruz County Records, All Rights, Privileges, Immunities and Appurtenances
12 of Whatever Nature Are Hereby Claimed, Paul Carrick – Owner.” Compl. ¶ 6.

13 On April 13, 2006, the County issued a Notice of Violation (“NOV”) to Carrick for zoning
14 and building violations of the Santa Cruz County Code. See Compl. ¶ 6. The NOV instructed
15 Carrick to cease construction, vacate illegal structures, and cease collecting rent. See Compl. ¶¶ 7-
16 10. The NOV also stated that the structures constituted a public nuisance. See Compl. ¶ 8. The
17 NOV was recorded against Carrick’s property. See Compl. at 7.

18 **B. Prior State Court Proceeding**

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21 ² The following facts are taken from Carrick’s complaint and judicially noticeable documents. All
22 exhibits referenced herein refer to Defendants’ Request for Judicial Notice filed in support of their
23 Motion to Dismiss Plaintiff’s Complaint on May 3, 2013. See Defs.’ Req. Jud. Notice Supp. Mot.
24 to Dismiss (“RJN”), ECF No. 15. These exhibits pertain to the pleadings and orders on file in the
25 prior state court proceeding in Santa Cruz County Superior Court, Case No. CV158731.
26 Defendants request that this Court take judicial notice of these exhibits. Defendants also request
27 that this Court take judicial notice of the pleadings on file in the related case before this Court,
28 Case No. 12-CV-3852-LHK. The Court takes judicial notice of these documents. See *Holder v.*
Holder, 305 F.3d 854, 866 (9th Cir. 2002) (taking judicial notice of court documents already in the
public record and documents filed in other courts). However, the Court does not take judicial
notice of facts in the public record that are “subject to reasonable dispute.” See *Lee v. City of L.A.*,
250 F.3d 668, 690 (9th Cir. 2001) (“When a court takes judicial notice of another court’s opinion,
it may do so not for the truth of the facts recited therein, but for the existence of the opinion, which
is not subject to reasonable dispute over its authenticity.”) (internal quotation marks and citation
omitted).

1 On November 28, 2007, the County filed a complaint against Carrick in the California
2 Superior Court for the County of Santa Cruz for permanent injunction, civil penalties, illegal rents,
3 attorney's fees, and costs. *See* RJN, Ex. A, ECF Nos. 15-1, 15-2. The complaint alleged that
4 Carrick failed to cure the zoning and building violations that were the subject of the NOV. *See id.*

5 Meanwhile, Carrick filed a cross-action against the County and others, seeking writ of
6 mandate and declaratory relief. *See* RJN, Ex. B, ECF No. 15-3 ("*Carrick I*"). The County then
7 filed a demurrer to Carrick's cross-action. The Superior Court overruled the demurrer as to
8 Carrick's first, second, third, and fourth causes of action (due process violations, nonconforming
9 use, state law preemption of the County's policy and procedures, and nuisance) and sustained the
10 demurrer as to Carrick's fifth and sixth causes of action (laches and equitable estoppel). *See* RJN,
11 Ex. C, ECF No. 15-4.

12 Carrick's surviving causes of action proceeded to trial, and the Superior Court ruled in
13 favor of the County on all surviving claims. *See* RJN, Ex. D, ECF No. 15-5. Accordingly, on
14 April 9, 2010, the Superior Court entered judgment for the County in Carrick's cross-action ("*April*
15 *9, 2010 Judgment*"). *See id.* Carrick then appealed the April 9, 2010 Judgment. *See* RJN, Ex. F,
16 ECF No. 15-7. The California Court of Appeal, Sixth Appellate District, upheld the Superior
17 Court's rulings in all respects but one; the Court of Appeal held that the County was not authorized
18 to record a NOV against Carrick's property without a court order. *See id.* In response, the County
19 expunged the NOV, and on May 24, 2011, the Superior Court ordered the re-recording of the
20 NOV. *See* RJN, Ex. I, ECF No. 15-10. Carrick then appealed the April 9, 2010 Judgment to the
21 California Supreme Court, which declined to hear Carrick's appeal. Finally, the United States
22 Supreme Court denied Carrick's Petition for a Writ of Certiorari, at which time the judgment
23 became final.

24 **C. Prior Proceeding Before this Court**

25 Carrick filed a complaint in the United States District Court on July 24, 2012, against the
26 County and the County Recorder (among others), which he then amended on July 31, 2012. *See*
27 *Carrick v. Santa Cruz County, et al.*, No. 12-CV-3852-LHK 2012, U.S. Dist. LEXIS 170685
28 ("*Carrick II*"), Compl., ECF No. 1; First Am. Compl. ("*FAC*"), ECF No. 23. Carrick's amended

1 complaint alleged eight enumerated causes of action, including (1) cancellation of instrument and
2 removal of cloud of title, and (2) land patent protections of property rights under the Homestead
3 Act. *See* FAC. Carrick subsequently moved for a preliminary injunction barring enforcement of
4 the Superior Court contempt charge on August 2, 2012. *See Carrick II*, ECF Nos. 36, 80, 81, 82,
5 and 83. Defendants filed a motion to dismiss on August 15, 2012. *See Carrick II*, ECF No. 63.
6 On November 30, 2012, this Court issued an order denying Carrick’s motion for a preliminary
7 injunction and granting Defendants’ motion to dismiss. *See Carrick II*, Order of Nov. 30, 2012
8 Granting Defs.’ Mot. to Dismiss FAC (“November 30, 2012 Order”), ECF No. 88. Among the
9 claims this Court dismissed were Carrick’s causes of action alleging (1) cancellation of instrument
10 and removal of cloud of title and (2) land patent protections of property rights under the Homestead
11 Act. *Id.* at 17-18. The November 30, 2012 Order granted Carrick leave to amend Carrick’s claims
12 under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, but denied leave to amend all other claims. *Id.* at 18.

13 Carrick filed his Second Amended Complaint on December 20, 2012. *See Carrick II*, ECF
14 No. 89. On January 3, 2013, Defendants filed a second motion to dismiss Carrick’s complaint. *See*
15 *Carrick II*, ECF No. 91. On July 16, 2013, the Court granted Defendants’ motion to dismiss
16 Carrick’s Second Amended Complaint with prejudice. *See Carrick II*, ECF No. 104. On July 19,
17 2013, judgment was entered in favor of all defendants. *See Carrick II*, ECF No. 105. On July 29,
18 2013, Carrick filed a notice of appeal. *See Carrick II*, ECF No. 106.

19 **D. Instant Proceeding**

20 Carrick filed the instant action on April 8, 2013 against Defendants (the County and the
21 County Recorder). *See* ECF No. 1. Carrick’s complaint alleges causes of action under: (1) the
22 Quiet Title Act, and (2) the Homestead Act. *See id.* Defendants filed a motion to dismiss
23 Carrick’s complaint pursuant to Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6) on May 3,
24 2013 (“Motion to Dismiss”). *See* ECF No. 14. Carrick filed an opposition to this motion, which he
25 entitled “Reply to Motion to Dismiss,” on May 17, 2013. *See* ECF No. 20. Defendants filed a
26 reply on May 21, 2013. *See* ECF No. 21.

1 **II. LEGAL STANDARDS**

2 **A. Motion to Dismiss Under Rule 12(b)(1)**

3 A defendant may move to dismiss an action for lack of subject matter jurisdiction pursuant
4 to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(1). A motion to dismiss for lack of subject matter
5 jurisdiction will be granted if the Complaint on its face fails to allege facts sufficient to establish
6 subject matter jurisdiction. *See Savage v. Glendale Union High Sch.*, 343 F.3d 1036, 1039 n.2 (9th
7 Cir. 2003). In considering a Rule 12(b)(1) motion, the Court “is not restricted to the face of the
8 pleadings, but may review any evidence, such as affidavits and testimony, to resolve factual
9 disputes concerning the existence of jurisdiction.” *McCarthy v. United States*, 850 F.2d 558, 560
10 (9th Cir. 1988) (citing *Land v. Dollar*, 330 U.S. 731, 735 n.4 (1947)). A Rule 12(b)(1) motion to
11 dismiss tests whether a complaint alleges grounds for federal subject matter jurisdiction. If the
12 plaintiff lacks standing under Article III of the U.S. Constitution, then the court lacks subject
13 matter jurisdiction, and the case must be dismissed. *See Steel Co. v. Citizens for a Better Env’t*,
14 523 U.S. 83, 101–02 (1998).

15 **B. Motion to Dismiss Under Rule 12(b)(6)**

16 Pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), a defendant may move to dismiss an
17 action for failure to allege “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Bell*
18 *Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). “A claim has facial plausibility when the
19 plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the
20 defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged. “The plausibility standard is not akin to a
21 ‘probability requirement,’ but it asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted
22 unlawfully.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (internal citations omitted). For purposes
23 of ruling on a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the Court “accept[s] factual allegations in the complaint as
24 true and construe[s] the pleadings in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party.” *Manzarek*
25 *v. St. Paul Fire & Marine Ins. Co.*, 519 F.3d 1025, 1031 (9th Cir. 2008). Moreover, pro se
26 pleadings are to be construed liberally. *Resnick v. Hayes*, 213 F.3d 443, 447 (9th Cir. 2000) (“[I]n
27 general, courts must construe pro se pleadings liberally.”).

1 **III. DISCUSSION**

2 Carrick cites the Quiet Title Act of 1974 as a basis of original jurisdiction “over disputes of
3 title relating to titles created by U.S. Law,” and implies that it is applicable when “a third party
4 clouds the title.” Compl. at 7. Carrick also relies on the Homestead Act of 1862 and the existence
5 of Homestead Certificate 4889 to argue that he is immune from County code enforcement actions
6 and should be allowed to develop and rent the premises independent of local laws. Compl. at 5-9.
7 Defendants move to dismiss Carrick’s Homestead Act and Quiet Title Act claims as barred by the
8 doctrine of res judicata. Mot. at 7-10. Defendants also move to dismiss the claims under the
9 *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine for lack of subject matter jurisdiction, Mot. at 5-6, and under the
10 *Younger* abstention doctrine, Mot. at 10-11.

11 With respect to res judicata, Defendants argue that Carrick’s claims are claims that were
12 raised or could have been raised in *Carrick I* (the prior state court proceeding) and that this Court
13 already ruled on Carrick’s Homestead Act claim in *Carrick II* (the prior proceeding before this
14 Court). See Mot. at 7-10. Defendants do not argue in their Motion to Dismiss that Carrick’s Quiet
15 Title Act claim could have been raised in *Carrick II*. However, the Court notes that Defendants
16 filed their Motion to Dismiss on May 3, 2013—before the Court granted Defendants’ motion to
17 dismiss Carrick’s Second Amended Complaint in *Carrick II* with prejudice on July 16, 2013, and
18 before the Court entered judgment in favor of all defendants in *Carrick II* on July 19, 2013. See
19 ECF No. 14; *Carrick II*, ECF Nos. 104, 105. Thus, the Court analyzes the res judicata effect of
20 *Carrick II* as to Carrick’s Quiet Title Act claim *sua sponte*. See *Headwaters Inc. v. United States*
21 *Forest Serv.*, 399 F.3d 1047, 1054 (9th Cir. 2005) (stating that, as a general matter, a court may
22 dismiss a case *sua sponte* based on res judicata).

23 Carrick argues in his opposition that his claims are not subject to res judicata. Opp’n at 5,
24 7. However, Carrick admits that he “sought attention to violations by the County of federal law” in
25 *Carrick II* and that *Carrick II* addressed federal patent law violations. Opp’n at 6, 9. For the
26 reasons set forth below, the Court finds that Carrick’s Homestead Act claim and Quiet Title Act
27 claim were raised or could have been raised in *Carrick II*—Carrick’s prior proceeding before this
28 Court. Because the Court finds that Carrick’s Homestead Act and Quiet Title Act claims are

1 barred by the doctrine of res judicata, the Court need not address Defendants’ *Rooker-Feldman*
2 doctrine and *Younger* abstention doctrine arguments.

3 **A. Res Judicata**

4 Res judicata, or claim preclusion, prohibits relitigation of any claims that were raised or
5 *could have been raised* in a prior action. *W. Radio Servs. Co., Inc. v. Glickman*, 123 F.3d 1189,
6 1192 (9th Cir. 1997) (emphasis added). The purpose of the doctrine is to “relieve parties of the
7 cost and vexation of multiple lawsuits, conserve judicial resources, and, by preventing inconsistent
8 decisions, encourage reliance on adjudication.” *Marin v. Hew, Health Care Financing Agency*,
9 769 F.2d 590, 594 (9th Cir. 1985) (quoting *Allen v. McCurry*, 449 U.S. 90, 94 (1980)). Res
10 judicata operates only where there is “(1) an identity of claims; (2) a final judgment on the merits;
11 and (3) identity or privity between parties.” *W. Radio Servs. Co.*, 123 F.3d at 1192.

12 As to the first element of res judicata, identity of claims, Carrick had already raised the
13 Homestead Act claim in *Carrick II*. In *Carrick II*, Carrick had alleged that the Homestead Act
14 requires Carrick to develop the land and that various code enforcement actions against Carrick
15 prevent him from doing so. FAC at ¶ 128. Carrick had also alleged that a property with a chain of
16 title tracing back to a land patent awarded under the Homestead Act is essentially immune from
17 County Code enforcement actions. FAC at ¶ 129. In the instant case, Carrick again raises the
18 same Homestead Act claim. Carrick alleges that Carrick’s property is not subject to code
19 enforcement because the chain of title to Carrick’s property traces back to a land patent under the
20 Homestead Act of 1862. Compl. at 5-9. Particularly, Carrick alleges that the County may not
21 prevent Carrick from renting out his property because Carrick’s property is “protected by
22 Certificate of Homestead 4889” and that “Homestead Certificate 4889 encourages development of
23 [Carrick]’s land.” Compl. at 1, 8. Thus, the first element of res judicata is met as to Carrick’s
24 Homestead Act claim.

25 Further, Carrick could have raised the Quiet Title Act claim in *Carrick II* as federal courts
26 have exclusive original jurisdiction of Quiet Title Act claims. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1346(f). Although
27 Carrick did not expressly assert the Quiet Title Act claim in *Carrick II*, Carrick does not avoid the
28 bar of res judicata “merely because he now alleges conduct by [Defendants] not alleged in his prior

1 suit, nor because he has pleaded a new legal theory.” *Constantini v. Trans World Airlines*, 681
2 F.2d 1199, 1201 (9th Cir. 1982). The crucial question is whether the party has stated in the instant
3 suit a cause of action different from those raised in his first suit. *See id.* When the two suits arise
4 out of the same transactional nucleus of facts, there is an identity of claims. *See Int’l Union of*
5 *Operating Eng’rs-Employers Constr. Indus. Pension, Welfare and Training Trust Funds v. Karr*,
6 994 F.2d 1426, 1430 (9th Cir. 1993).

7 Interestingly, Carrick does not assert the Quiet Title Act to challenge the United States’ title
8 to Carrick’s property, which would be the proper assertion of a Quiet Title Act claim. *See Block v.*
9 *North Dakota ex rel. Bd. of University and School Lands*, 461 U.S. 273, 286 (1983) (Congress
10 intended the Quiet Title Act to “provide the exclusive means by which adverse claimants could
11 challenge the United States’ title to real property.”). Instead, Carrick asserts the Quiet Title Act as
12 a basis for cancelling the NOV and obtaining injunctive relief from the County’s enforcement of its
13 regulations. *See Compl.* at 7-10. Essentially, Carrick alleges that the NOV and the County’s
14 enforcement of its regulations as to Carrick’s property “clouded the title.” *See Compl.* at 7. Thus,
15 Carrick appears to improperly assert a Quiet Title Act claim against Defendants rather than the
16 United States, which would be the proper defendant in a Quiet Title Act claim. Nevertheless,
17 Carrick’s Quiet Title Act “claim” arose from the same “transactional nucleus of facts” as Carrick’s
18 claims in *Carrick II*. Carrick alleges that “[t]he title was clouded in 2006 by actions of [the
19 County].” *Id.* The “actions” to which Carrick refers are the County’s enforcement of the local
20 land use regulations and the issuance of the NOV as to Carrick’s property. *See Compl.* at 5-9.
21 These are the same “actions” that Carrick challenged and from which Carrick sought relief in
22 *Carrick II*. *See FAC.* In *Carrick II*, one of Carrick’s claims is “cancellation of instrument and
23 removal of cloud on title.” *See FAC* at 37-38. Carrick also based this claim on the County’s
24 issuance of the NOV and the enforcement of its regulations. Because Carrick’s claims in *Carrick*
25 *II* and Carrick’s Quiet Title Act “claim” in the instant case arose out of the same “transactional
26 nucleus of facts,” there is an identity of claims. Accordingly, the first element of res judicata is
27 also met as to Carrick’s Quiet Title Act claim.
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1 As to the second element, final judgment on the merits, the Court has already ruled on all of
2 Carrick's claims in *Carrick II*. In *Carrick II*, the Court dismissed all of Carrick's claims with
3 prejudice. Such a dismissal constitutes a final judgment on the merits to which res judicata applies.
4 See *Federated Dep't Stores v. Moitie*, 452 U.S. 394, 399 n.3 (1981); *Stewart v. U.S. Bancorp*, 297
5 F.3d 953, 957 (9th Cir. 2002). Moreover, the Court entered judgment in favor of all defendants in
6 *Carrick II*. Therefore, the second element of res judicata is met.

7 Finally, the third element, identity or privity between parties, is also met. In *Carrick II*,
8 Carrick had named both the County and the County Recorder as defendants. See FAC. In the
9 instant case, Carrick is suing both the County and the County Recorder again.

10 All three elements of res judicata are satisfied. Accordingly, the Court GRANTS
11 Defendants' motion to dismiss Carrick's Quiet Title Act and Homestead Act claims. Because
12 amendment of these claims would be futile, the dismissal is with prejudice.

13 **IV. CONCLUSION**

14 For the foregoing reasons, the Court GRANTS Defendants' Motion to Dismiss Carrick's
15 Complaint with prejudice. The Clerk shall close the file.

16 **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

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18 Dated: October 18, 2013

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20 LUCY H. KOH
21 United States District Judge
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