

Tuesday's meetings of Mayor and Council were challenging on so very many levels. Ultimately, I believe we made wise - if difficult - decisions. Time will tell, but the discussions we held reflect the seriousness with which we take the critically important issues that confront us as a Council and a community. Let me go through a few of them with you, starting with the most difficult:

- **10% Cut to Outside Agencies:** As someone who has volunteered on dozens of nonprofit boards over the years, who understands the unique and important role these agencies play in maintaining our quality of life in Tucson, this was one of the most painful votes I've made during my tenure on Council. But there was no choice. Our economy has taken a nose dive, and although we budgeted very conservatively for this year in anticipation of a drop in revenue, nobody could have predicted the stock market crash, failures of major national companies, and the resulting depth and breadth of our national economic crisis. Once initial figures started coming in, however, we realized we'd have to make serious cuts to our already austere budget, which we began implementing immediately, as detailed below. Bottom line, however, is that the economy continues to worsen, and we had to take appropriate steps.

Tuesday, we expanded our internal cuts to include outside agencies we fund with City General Fund dollars. The many agencies that receive this funding through the City perform essential services to our community. They help the elderly, care for our children, improve the quality of life for all of us ... and so much more. But if the dollars aren't there, there's little else we could responsibly do. We are charged with having a balanced budget by year end ... and we can't wait until the end of the year to act.

Our actual action took place as part of Consent Agenda Tuesday evening, but that vote followed a lengthy and detailed conversation during Study Session outlining our budget shortfalls and the need to take action. During Call to the Audience at the evening meeting we heard from many wonderful individuals - including our former Mayor George Miller - who are clearly passionate about the services provided by our outside agencies. Call to the Audience is a challenge because by law we can not respond to anything said by speakers. I do hope those who spoke realize this was not an action we took lightly. There were no sacred cows. Every agency received a 10% cut in allotted funds. So, if ever there were a time for each of us to step up individually, that time is now. Whether as a volunteer or a

financial contributor, you can help these agencies that are feeling the pinch.

- Budget Shortfalls: During Study Session Tuesday afternoon, we were presented with the increasingly dismal budget figures with which we must deal:
  - Unprecedented drops in sales tax revenue: This is the first time ever that we've had two consecutive years of drops in sales tax revenues. And, given national trends, it is unlikely this grim situation will turn around any time soon.
  - Increasing budget shortfalls: As a result of the drops in revenue, our initial financial forecast was pretty dismal, predicting a \$40.8-million shortfall - this despite careful budgeting, including no raises or cost-of-living increases for City staff. But we've been taking appropriate additional actions for months, with total cost savings of approximately \$37-million:
    - Staffing:
      - Cuts: 165 positions have been permanently cut throughout the City, with none in police or fire departments.
      - Holding Vacant: An additional 62 positions are being held vacant for some portion of this fiscal year.
    - Administrative: Further savings have come from combining departments; curbing expenditures for travel, training and general spending; and stop-gap measures such as restructuring our debt.
    - Departmental: Every department has had to cut its budget by at least 10%, again with the exception of police and fire. Until Tuesday, no City programs had been cut, though certainly staff cuts impact services.

But it's even worse than that now, with the prediction of an additional \$10-million shortfall. That is part of what precipitated the need to have outside nonprofit agencies take a 10% cut. As I said at the beginning, this was one of the most painful votes I've had to make, but I firmly believe it was the responsible action to take.

- Home Foreclosures Are Up: That's no surprise to anyone, but the extent

of the problem is difficult to grasp ... and the problem is worsening. From January through August citywide, more than 2,000 people lost their homes. Staggering! The Southwest Fair Housing Council study showed that the majority of these foreclosures are occurring in a pocket of three zip codes on the south side. The title of their report was The American Nightmare. An apt name. The resulting impacts: decreased property values, decreased tax revenues and destabilized neighborhoods. Again, a time for us as a community to come together and work together to help our neighbors and protect our neighborhoods. The report offered five recommendations, which we accepted: create a foreclosure task force to coordinate our area response; offer foreclosure counseling to help the individuals losing their homes; adopt an anti-predatory lending ordinance, which is something we'll have to approach on the state level; create a neighborhood early warning system to anticipate problems; and create a community land trust to create affordable housing stock in perpetuity, something we've already been working on as a Council for months.

- Violent Crime Statistics are Down: That's good news, but still far from great. Crime remains a serious concern for our community, but the stats presented to us indicate more than 1/3 of the crimes are drug and/or gang related. Our police department is targeting specific pockets of crime and responding quickly and effectively to address the situation. Some residents are joining TPD in the fight against crime by forming Neighborhood Watch groups. Members of Neighborhood Watch are never asked to put themselves in crime's way. However, residents can provide TPD a great deal of assistance to combat crime by watching out for suspicious activity in neighborhoods. For more information on forming a Neighborhood Watch please visit [http://tpdinternet.tucsonaz.gov/CrimePrevention/neighborhood\\_watch.html](http://tpdinternet.tucsonaz.gov/CrimePrevention/neighborhood_watch.html)
- Protecting Our Desert: Pima County took a bold step many years ago with passage of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. One element of that plan, the Conservation Lands System [CLS], is designed to protect biodiversity and provide land use guidelines consistent with the goals of the Plan. Tuesday, we unanimously passed a policy that maintains CLS land use designations when a parcel is annexed into the City. This provides basic protections to preserve key flora and fauna in our desert, but it also allow flexibility to look at each parcel to determine how best to protect it. And it again points to the importance of taking a hard look at every element in our land use code to be sure we're facilitating development where appropriate,

but providing important protections where we want to preserve native corridors and other areas of biological or cultural importance. Flexibility ... but also predictability. Two key elements as we move forward as a community.

- **Community Facilities Districts:** We took action to create policies and guidelines to create these districts, an important tool as we grow. This offers developers another funding mechanism to pay for infrastructure for their projects. Mayor and Council serve as the directors of any district that might be formed, so unless there is sound community benefit, the CFD will not be accepted. These can be used for commercial as well as residential developments. One very important element for me in this program is the protection given potential home buyers on the residential side, making sure they understand what their financial responsibility in paying back the bond will be. No surprises ... and no impact on the City's bond rating and ability to borrow money on behalf of the City.

So, it was a jammed day, filled with detailed discussions and painful decisions necessary to maintain the financial viability of our community. These are not easy times. [I feel like Eeyore, predicting doom and gloom, but we face myriad challenges not of our making as a City.]

But let me leave you with a few more uplifting and fun items that have been going on:

- **Pastor Plaza:** Last Friday we dedicated the plaza in front of the Historic Depot in honor of Ed Pastor, our former congressman who now represents only the Phoenix area. Congressman Pastor served us so well on so many levels, but most especially when it came to transportation issues, which is why it was appropriate to dedicate this area in his honor. He fought long and hard for funding that helped us renovate and revitalize the Depot ... and create our transportation hub downtown. But his efforts are not just in the past. The Congressman holds a warm place in his heart for Tucson and continues to fight for us, most recently in our efforts to secure funding for the Modern Streetcar that is so vital to our downtown revitalization. It was an unusual dedication: lots of banter, old stories, gentle joking, and mutual respect. Truly enjoyable!
- **Mary Meredith School Dedication:** This special program within TUSD has a brand new, carefully designed campus to house programs for students with special needs. No longer in portable classrooms, the students there were glowing about their new facility, which they helped design!

## Congratulations!

- Solon Solar: The future is now! It was so exciting to attend the dedication of the new manufacturing facility for Solon Solar. Great jobs. Emerging technology. 21st century clean industry based in Tucson and Germany. I am confident the folks at Solon will be great community partners for years to come!
- Gay Pride Parade: I was honored to serve as the Grand Marshall of this year's parade, which went from Broadway and Country Club down to day long festivities being held at the DeMeester Performance Center in Reid Park. This was one more opportunity to celebrate our diverse and wonderful community!
- Desert Living Is Different! This newcomers guidebook to desert living was written and illustrated by area students from kindergarten through high school. Delightful drawings, insightful stories and poems all put together in a book that will be given to anyone moving to our community ... or who has lived here less than 2 years. This was part of a project by the Southern Arizona Writing Project in the department of English at the UA that brought together dozens of teachers and hundreds of students. We were pleased to use Youth Empowerment Funds to help the project see print ... and last Sunday we hosted a book signing for the youngsters and their family and friends. More than 300 people participated ... and the pride and joy on the faces of these young published authors was contagious! Such fun! Want a book? If you're a newcomer, it's free through the Metro Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau. If you've been here a while you'll still love it ... at a cost of a \$5 donation, which will support the next printing of this environmental guide. For more information, contact: Kitty Reeve at 327-0813.
- Mars and Martians visit Ward VI! Please join us on November 6th from 4:30 - 6:30 for the opening of our Mars! exhibit at Ward VI. World renowned UA professor Peter Smith, who is the principal investigator on the Mars Lander Project, will join us as we unveil wall-sized photos of Mars taken by the Lander, which was developed here at the UA. There will also be 3-D photos [we'll provide the glasses!], detailed images of the Mars surface, information about the project and what they've found thus far ... and MORE ... including our own display of 'Martians'. Dr. Smith's wife, Dana, among her many talents is a ceramic artist. She invited Mars Lander scientists, staff and family to a creative break creating their own Martians.

About one dozen of these fanciful clay critters will also be on display.

- **Open Studio Tour:** On November 8th and 9th, you can savor the wide range of artistic talent that makes Tucson home at the Tucson Pima Arts Council's Open Studios Tour. A meet-the-artist reception will be held on Nov 6, but the Tour on the 8th and 9th gives you the chance to see where artists create their work. Glassblowers, painters, jewelers, mix media artists, photographers, print makers and sculptors are opening their doors to the public. They are among a record-setting 153 artists participating in the Tour this year. This longtime Tucson tradition is presented by the Tucson Pima Arts Council. For more information, a map of studio locations and a preview of the artists' work, visit [www.tucsonpimaartscouncil.org/ost](http://www.tucsonpimaartscouncil.org/ost).
- **Vote Vote Vote:** It's getting close! Take time to study the propositions ... and make your choices for all the very important offices on which we, the voters of Arizona, will have our say. But to have your say, please make certain you know what you'll need to bring with you at the polls. Check out this website for details: [http://www.tucsonaz.gov/ward6/announcements/CMS1\\_033345.html](http://www.tucsonaz.gov/ward6/announcements/CMS1_033345.html) For more information, contact County Recorder F. Ann Rodriguez at 351-6830.

So much happening! No meeting next week, but I'll try to be in touch anyway. As always, your feedback is most welcome!

*Nina*

Nina J. Trasoff  
Councilmember - Ward VI  
3202 East 1st Street  
Tucson, Arizona 85716  
520-791-4601 Office  
520-791-3211 Fax  
<http://www.tucsonaz.gov/ward6/>