

Here's the dose of reality given the Council at Study Session this Tuesday. Our 2010 budget shortfall in the General Fund is \$80-million. To clarify, while our overall budget is just over \$1-billion, the only monies with which we have any flexibility come from the General Fund. Our 2009 fiscal budget fell short by \$44-million, which we've made up mostly through internal cuts, including having 166 fewer City staff now than we did one year ago.

But now we are dealing with our 2010 budget. Our conservative budget plan was based on \$502-million in General Fund dollars. Our reality: only \$422-million is expected to be available, representing approximately a 16% reduction. A few of the steps already taken to fill that \$80-million hole include the City Manager working with each department to make cuts and analyzing the hundreds of suggestions City staff have made, some of which are being implemented. But more must be done.

So we in Tucson are confronting the same budget challenges our state and national Governments are coping with. We are in a Recession ... with a capital 'R' that many also describe as a Depression. Whatever its label, it means we as a city, state and nation must closely examine our priorities and work together to make the most with the limited means at hand.

Let me share my initial thinking with you in hopes that you will provide feedback on which approaches and priorities will best serve our community.

There are some vital community services that only city government can provide. Those include ensuring Public Safety, maintaining our parks and our streets, and operating our public transit, Tucson Water and Environmental Services. Though those are services we can and must provide, there are other services that reflect our priorities as a caring and humane community. Among those are support for domestic violence programs as well as programs that provide food and shelter for those in greatest need in Tucson.

Perhaps the basic approach should be to do no harm ... or do as little harm as possible in these difficult times. But that approach must consider not only the immediacy of specific needs, such as food and shelter, but also long term programs that will help us emerge from the recession more quickly and better positioned to prosper as a community.

Which decisions are fiscally prudent at the moment, and don't do greater harm to our community in the long run? Economic development, for one. Dollars that support Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities (TREO), for example, generate new jobs

and strengthen our overall economy. Then there's job training, which may not seem as urgent as basic food and shelter, but job training can help lift people out of poverty, it can help make Tucson more attractive to new businesses, it can help improve quality of life for so many individuals – and their families. Tucson must continue to build a trained workforce offering individuals greater opportunity.

And there are so many nonprofits that do incredible work that have relied for years on City funding, but whose work we may not have enough money available to fund. Will community members step up to fill the gap? Tucson has always been a generous and caring community. I believe that will continue to be the case now, but these are challenging times for everyone.

And so I ask for your feedback. We'll be holding a community forum on the budget on February 26th at 6PM at the Ward VI Council Office. Please join us. Provide your thoughts. Or write to us now. Our primary focus as a Council is and must be the budget. I'd value your feedback now.

Many thanks.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nina".

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