

Greetings from Ward VI ~

As you know, these remain challenging times for our community. We've received so many emails from constituents concerned with a lessening in City Services ... and, unfortunately, that is the harsh reality with which we must deal. Our City staff is working harder with fewer people to try to maintain service levels people in our community want ... and deserve. But it's hard!

One example: several people have written about the weeds growing in our medians. In an effort to cut back on expenses, we've cut back our contract with the landscaping service that has been keeping weeds under control for years ... and we can't accept volunteer offers for liability reasons. The medians are simply too dangerous. But staff is aware of the problem and is arranging for City workers to address the mess!

Tuesday's meeting was, as always, filled with important issues I'd like to discuss with you.

- Raytheon Annexation: We took the next important step towards annexing Raytheon Corporation into the City of Tucson. There are many benefits for both sides, not the least of which is an anticipated \$1-million in tax revenue to the City's General Fund each year! Of importance to me, though, is that this is a true win/win, including for the Firefighters and other workers at Raytheon. They'd been concerned there might be job losses with the annexation, but we've been assured there will be none as a result of our action.
- Budget: Each meeting we're looking into some aspect of the budget. Tuesday we looked at the current hole, which amounts to \$6.6-million, but that is based on budget assumptions that have been able to handle most of the rest of the \$80-million revenue gap between our anticipated revenues and what is actually coming into our coffers due to the economic collapse. We're exploring revenue generating approaches that hopefully can take care of \$5-million of the shortfall. Progress, though painful.
- Rio Nuevo: Council decided to explore seeking an independent audit to assure taxpayers that monies are being spent appropriately. Staff will come back to us in 60 days with a plan and attendant costs.

A motion to separate Rio Nuevo from the Manager's office failed. I voted against this concept for a variety of reasons, including the fact that, by statute, the Manager is the executive director of Rio Nuevo; and Downtown revitalization and Rio Nuevo are inextricably linked and depend on each other

for success. Rio Nuevo takes place only within certain boundaries that do NOT encompass the entire downtown area. I believe the continued linkage between both economic development efforts is important. The majority of my colleagues agreed.

[The Rio Nuevo website is in the process of being updated, so bear with us if it available when you log on until next week.]

- Openness: Prior to the vote on the motion to take Rio Nuevo out of the City Manager's hands, I expressed my discomfort with considering that motion without prior Mayor and Council discussion. To be clear, I am not suggesting that motions be prearranged – nor that everyone approve before a topic is brought up for consideration. Quite the opposite. I welcome the opportunity to discuss ANY topic publicly, exchanging ideas with my colleagues at the table. I simply believe that we should discuss an issue of such gravity – in public – before any of us comes forward with a motion. We should take the time to research, think and consider before being asked to vote on critical issues.

Then there are other ongoing projects on which I need to provide you an update:

- Street Fair Parking: Ward VI received a number of e-mails and phone calls from people who received parking tickets during the recent Fourth Avenue Street Fair. Most of these citations carried \$175 fines, raising the ire of folks who feel the city should be more lenient during the Street Fair. It is important to understand that those citations were issued by our ParkWise agents because cars were parked in places that represent a safety hazard to the public – both the visitors to Fourth Avenue and those who live in surrounding neighborhoods. ParkWise agents were actually lenient on many others who were in less blatant violation of state law. For future Street Fairs, the City will work in advance with the Fourth Avenue Merchants Association to suspend some parking restrictions not based on public safety and to promote shuttle services to the Avenue. Remember, though, the best way to avoid being cited is to obey parking signs!
- Residency Requirements for Department Heads: A motion to amend the residency requirement for senior staff and department heads failed on Tuesday. I supported the motion presented by Councilmember Shirley Scott to exempt City staffers hired before May 2008 from the requirement that they live in the City. I agree with the spirit of the residency requirement – that our highest-ranking city leaders should live in the community where they provide services. *But I believe it is unfair to change the rules for people who*

already have committed decades of service to our community.

- Parking reductions: Three proposed changes to our parking codes – designed to make our older commercial spaces viable places to do business – were approved 8-2 by the City of Tucson Planning Commission. This was an important – and much appreciated – step toward bringing these changes to Mayor and Council this Spring, I look forward to the discussion of these parking reductions with my colleagues. I hope they will agree that we've struck a delicate balance between activating properties made useless by our current parking codes and preserving the quality of life in neighborhoods adjacent to commercial properties.
- Water: Fees will probably be going up ... and it may be hard to understand in a way, because water usage is going down thanks to our amazing success in water conservation as a City. But the actual cost of the water is NOT the only cost; the water system/maintenance/delivery/infrastructure costs are constant – and increasing – despite the amount of water used.
- Plastic Bag Ordinance: We formalized the preliminary approach to reducing plastic bag litter in our community. Thanks to a cooperative approach with the groups representing retail and grocery industries, large businesses that give out the plastic bags must also recycle them ... and both promote and make it easy for folks to bring their bags back for recycling. This cooperative approach has worked in other communities, and I believe this alliance between the City and these private organizations will reap huge rewards for us!
- Call to the Audience: This half hour comes towards the beginning of each meeting, allowing individuals to come forward and speak to Council. We hear opinions on virtually everything ... and it's great. But for the last several weeks, we've been enriched by presentations from artists. We've had poets, dancers, drummers, singers and more. Special thanks to Karen Falkenstrom of Odaiko Sonora for starting this ... and to all the artists who have participated thus far. I do hope this is the start of a new tradition.
- Feedback from my last Perspectives: Dozens of you wrote with your thoughts on budget priorities. I've put those comments into a document that I'm sharing with my colleagues and staff. Some great ideas came forward ... and I thank each of you who took the time to write. I read every single email! And there were many of them.

So many wonderful activities in town! Here are a few coming up ... and a few other odds and ends for your consideration:

- Cesar Chavez March Saturday 3/28: This annual event honoring Cesar Chavez begins at 9AM at Pueblo High School, with people gathering there then walking to Rudy Garcia Park for a rally, music and speakers. For more information, visit www.azcesarchavezcoalition.com or call 940-7752.
- Solar Rock Tucson: At high noon in Himmel Park, gather for live music, food, information, kids activities – all powered by the sun. Activities will continue until 6PM.
- Midtown Yard Sale Saturday 3/28 from 8 to 4: Looking for bargains? Come to the garden District Neighborhood Association Community Yard Sale/Craft/Art Sale. There will be 31 vendors at 1933 North Bell, which is one block west of Swan.

Next Perspectives I'll fill you in on some of the other activities I'll be taking part in this weekend, including the UA's Mortarboard Honor Society and seven University-area neighborhoods massive area clean up, the Interfaith Coalition on the Homeless 4th Annual Empty Bowls dinner, and MOCA's Local Genius Awards Gala. These are just a few of the many activities taking place in the Old Pueblo this weekend. So many events! So little time!!!!

As always, please stay in touch!

Nina

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