Ward 6 Staff

Steve Kozachik
Council Member

Ann Charles

Donovan Durband

Teresa Smith

Christal Ferree

Bonnie Medler

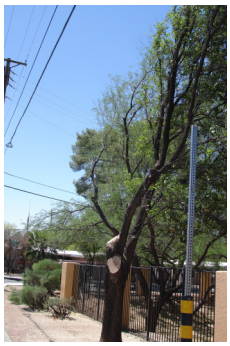
Ward 6 – Newsletter

A Message from Steve

JULY 20, 2011

Now that we're into the monsoon season, each of us has a heightened concern over tree limbs growing up into utility lines and potentially causing electrical outages, or worse. With that in mind, Tucson Electric Power (TEP) contracts with a tree trimming company to roll around town and maintain what could be troublesome limbs. If you see potential hazards in this area, call 623-7711 and they'll direct your concerns to the right people.

What is troubling is when the tree trimmers attack a potentially problem tree without regard to either the eventual impact on the health of the tree or the aesthetics they leave behind. The following three photographs are examples of the butchering of our landscape that occurs in the name of keeping limbs out of electric lines. These trees, if they survive at all, are now an eyesore to the community.



I have spoken with several people at TEP and with people who serve on our Citizen's Landscape Advisory Committee (LAC) about this. To hear that the vendor employs a "utility arborist" begs the question as to which part of that title the person gives preference to. Based on the pictures, it's not the arborist element.

I understand the need to make deep cuts when hazards are imminent. I also understand that the City is on a three-year trim cycle and that due to growth patterns, some acceleration of that schedule might become necessary in some cases. Also I understand that we, the public, have an obligation to avoid planting trees in locations that will eventually conflict with overhead utility lines.

With all of that having been said, I expect the vendor to stop with the meat axe approach to "trimming" our trees and to work more closely with the LAC in the future

Important Phone Numbers

Tucson Police Department
911 or 791-4444 nonemergency

Mayor & Council Comment Line
791-4700

Neighborhood Resources
791-4605

Park Wise
791-5071

Water Issues
791-3242

Pima County Animal Control
243-5900

Street Maintenance 791-3154

Planning and Development Services 791-5550

Southwest Gas
889-1888

Gas Emergency/ Gas Leaks
889-1888

West Nile Virus Hotline
243-7999

Environment Service
791-3171

Graffiti Removal
792-2489

AZ Game & Fish
628-5376

so we're not left with more examples of what you see above.

Soon you will be seeing notices of meetings related to the Grant Road Improvement Plan. This is the long term RTA project that will include various road widening, rezoning, intersection improvements, and multi-modal transit components extending from Grant and Oracle out to Grant and Swan. The project team is now scheduling public informational/ comment meetings. You will be hearing of them soon.

A part of the project will be widening portions of the corridor and the inevitable acquisition of some structures, in part or in full. However, this is going to be a long-term project and so one of my early efforts was to have staff adopt a Safe Harbor process whereby existing buildings were allowed to stand and be used for commercial purposes, avoiding the situation where we could see vacant structures literally for years in anticipation of construction and demolition.

My proposal was to write a specific ordinance that laid out criteria by which we avoided that potential blight. Staff did me one better. They proposed, and M&C adopted, an update to a previously troubled Certificate of Occupancy Ordinance that addresses many of my concerns. Specifically, these regulations allow a property to be used for any lawful land use allowed under the existing underlying zoning, provided the site is in the same configuration as determined by 2005 aerial photos. That simply means that if there is a change of ownership and the proposed use is in the same use classification, barring safety and health considerations, the structure may stay activated pending arrival of the construction.

This is a good news result. No need for yet another regulation, but tweaking an existing one to allow for common sense to prevail. Thanks to City Staff for working with M&C on coming up with this result.

Over the past couple of weeks I have been rather involved with the various issues related to the City 9-1-1 emergency response Communications Center. There are generally two specific parts to this issue; the technical part of rolling out a new system and staffing concerns I have with respect to Fire/EMS, 9-1-1, and TPD Dispatchers. Let me take them in order.

The overarching principle that should be guiding all of this discussion is the safety of the public. Not dropping into a defensive posture or putting out information that misinforms. Regrettably, that is what I have observed with respect to communications about the current state of the system.

The facts are pretty simple. Let me address them in the context of a letter recently sent out of the City Manager's Office to the Arizona Daily Star Editorial Board. (Manager's points in *Italics.)*

Point 1: *An upgrade to our old 9-1-1 system was necessary* – Absolutely true.
Point 2: *The new system is in use successfully in various communities around the Country, as well as by our own Police Department* – Absolutely true and borderline irrelevant since ours is not working properly.
Point 3: *The launch of the new system followed a 12 month pre-planning phase that involved the 9-1-1 Administrator, Supervisors, as well as representatives of the manufacturer (Vesta) and the installer (Qwest.)* – Absolutely true and here is where the problems begin. Note that none of the people involved with the pre-planning are any of the front line workers who have to live with the system. Note that in no part of the City Manager's report does he disclose that it was predicted that problems would occur. Note that in no part of the City

Manager's report does he disclose that the problems we have been experiencing far exceeded those that were anticipated. Note that in no part of the City Manager's report is it disclosed that during the roll-out of the TPD *Vesta* system several years ago they also experienced problems – one would think we'd have learned from that experience and applied those lessons learned to this new roll-out and resolved them before going live with it – which leads to,

Point 4: *The City engaged in a two week trial period during which the old system was maintained as a back-up, following which it was disconnected* (actually it was dismantled and cannot be reconstructed) *and the new system went live w/o the ability to switch back to the previous system* – True, again. Why? What possible thinking process would lead (management) the City to dismantle the old system, go live with the new one, and not leave the old system for a back-up while we were still not satisfied with the performance of the new one?

Point 5: *The Manager states that the City "continues to maintain redundant backup processes for the 911 system to ensure calls are handled quickly and accurately, even in the event of a technological or power failure, or natural disaster."* – Interesting comment, given the fact that when I asked if we could go back to the old system while working out the kinks in the new one, I was told that we cannot, and that we're stuck with what's being operated now. If we have had that ability, why has it not been implemented instead of continuing to operate with a system that has caused so much concern that Qwest has assigned multiple technicians to the site to work through the difficulties.

Point 6: *The Manager notes that we anticipated a 6-8 week trial period, during which we'd be addressing technical issues (*why not address those before we take the system live and not leave ourselves without a back-up system?) *and that some of the issues that were initially experienced have dropped off in frequency. He also notes some functions the previous system offered to Dispatchers that are not included in the new system.* – As noted earlier, the significant group who was not included in the selection of the new system was the front line Dispatchers. Some of the features of the new system that differ from the old system have proven to be significant to the people who operate it. The ability to have a second set of eyes and ears on a call without having to manually access that back-up, the ability to use what is known as an Alerting System (used to identify which fire stations are out in the field), a condition in which hitting a keyboard key while toggled to the wrong monitor can disconnect a caller and more.

There are those who have asked me why I'm so involved with this issue. Why have my staff and I taken the time to physically sit with dispatchers and listen to their first-hand accounts of issues? The points raised above contain that answer. Do I think we can resolve all of these issues? I know that we cannot. Do I believe the front line Dispatchers' input should have been obtained before selection of the system? Yes. Is it too late for any of that now? Yes, so we do the best with what we have and trust the Qwest technicians will bring this system up to the most proficient operations standards possible. It's working in other jurisdictions – it can here, as well.

The second part of this issue is staffing. This is one we can deal with and should deal with immediately.

The 9-1-1 Communications Center is short on workers. Depending on whose data you consider, and the date from which you choose your baseline, we're down anywhere from 10-18 workers on the Fire/EMS side alone. The 9-1-1 and Police operators only add to that num-

Important Phone Numbers

Senator John McCain (R)
520-670-6334

Senator Jon Kyl (R)
520-575-8633

Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords (D)
(8th District)
520-881-3588

Congressman Raul Grijalva (D)
(7th District)
520-622-6788

Governor Janice Brewer (R)
Governor of Arizona
602-542-4331
Toll free:
1-800-253-0883

State Legislators
Toll Free Telephone:
1-800-352-8404
Internet:
www.azleg.gov

Mayor Bob Walkup
791-4201

City Infoguide
http://cms3.tucsonaz.gov/infoguide

ber. It takes from nine months to a year to fully train a new employee in these positions. We are recruiting workers and we are not competitive in the local marketplace.

We have to staff seats on a 24/7 basis, irrespective of whether or not the worker who would normally fill a particular work slot is scheduled for a furlough day. When that occurs, we fill the seat with a replacement worker; i.e. a worker being called in on overtime.

So, what's wrong with that picture?
We are understaffed.
We do not offer competitive rates of pay compared to some local jurisdictions.

Therefore, the City Manager must immediately instruct his Human Resource staff to begin the process of conducting a market analysis to see where we are uncompetitive and, where it is shown to be appropriate, reclassify our workers to a level at which we can successfully compete for new hires.

We force our workers to take nine furlough days off per year (a policy we have implemented to help with our budget deficit). We fill their seats on those days with workers being paid overtime. Those workers are therefore working in excess of their normal 40 hour work week in what is an already highly stressful position and in a position in which we expect them to be at the top of their game. So, based on input I receive from both the front line workers and from the City Manager's budget office, we are paying a premium to fill a seat with a tired worker. Keep in mind that this is a tired worker that not only has the stress of the job but also a new (and at times problematic) system.

Therefore, the City Manager should immediately gather the data to support the elimination of furlough days from Fire/EMS, 9-1-1 Dispatchers and TPD Communications Center workers and make an administrative decision to exclude this group of workers from the mandated City furlough program. The budget capacity is there for the new hires because we save money by not furloughing existing workers. Confirming these points should not require a long drawn out process involving the use of an outside Audit Commission. The City Manager recently lauded the quality of his current finance staff and I join him in recognizing their competence. Confirm the data with them and show the leadership to make this decision immediately. The safety of the public should be the focal point of the decision making process, so even if the data is close to a break even, err in favor of that.

I believe this item deserves the scrutiny it is getting. I continue to receive input from a variety of directions: from Qwest trainers, from front line supervisors, from front line workers, from previous employees, from staff members who work in other departments who have reason to know about the Communications Center operation, and from members of the general public. I am hopeful that we see the City Manager step-up to the plate and show your leadership, rely on his inner circle staff members' input and do the right thing, as outlined above.

Earlier, I rhetorically asked "Why am I involved?" Because no one else seemed to be making any decisions and the situation has the potential to significantly impact the safety of all citizens. I have and will continue to force the City Manager to address these vital issues. I will also continue to keep you educated and involved. Transparency is crucial to community and I will not fight these battles silently. You deserve to know the truth.

Thanks for indulging all of that…

While the City Manager's office is being discussed …
In November the City is set to host the Arizona Centennial Best Fest – a show that is being booked for several areas and venues in the downtown area. It includes food booths, a parade, themed street performers, local entertainers and more. So does 2nd Saturdays and associated with that, the Fox has Up With People booked for that weekend as well. The Tucson Pima Arts Council Open Studio Arts Tour and the Unisource Grand Opening are also scheduled for that weekend. The TCC has events booked. However, none of those other events have been seated at the table for the purpose of coordinating these multiple events that will necessarily overlap and impact one another.

Not more than two M&C meetings ago I had called for a study session agenda item in which we specifically discussed the formation of a civic events committee that would be charged with assisting in staging multiple events. The director of Tucson Meet Yourself, Mia Hansen, also heads up a group that has substantial experience in staging events in our City (FEATSAZ). She addressed M&C at that study session and was enlisted to assist the Manager's designee in putting these events together. With respect to the November overlapping events, FEATSAZ has not been allowed a voice at the table and the Phoenix based Best Fest has been given priority over local events, despite the significant amount of money and sweat equity that the locals have invested in downtown events, over the last two years in particular.

Note to the City Manager: include our local talent in planning these events or you will give them an incentive to move to another location. Pretty simple. Ancillary note to the Council Members: work with local groups competing for ice time in the TCC so we maximize our investment in laying the ice. It's costly and, to the extent that we're not accommodating the interest of several local groups who want access, we do the community a disservice.

Ok, I need to end on an up note. Tucson Meet Yourself is looking for volunteers. Go to http://www.tucsonmeetyourself.org/ and you can follow the links related to working that event. It will be on October 14, 15 and 16. You've all heard of it and most of you have probably participated in it. Now is your chance to get directly involved with it as a volunteer.

Enjoy the monsoons and all their beauty but please be careful.

Sincerely,

Steve Kozachik
Council Member, Ward 6
www.tucsonaz.gov/ward6