

Did He Lie?

On Wednesday, November 19th, Mr. Sanchez, Director of Development Services Department, made five statements to the Infrastructure and Growth committee about Zoning Commission's decision to reject the Camp Bullis Lighting Overlay Ordinance on Tuesday.

Let us examine each of these.

"1. In addition to posting the draft ordinance on the UDC page of the Department's website, it has now been added to the front page as well."

Critique: Note that he does not state when the draft ordinance was added.

I made the complaint to the Zoning Commission meeting on Tuesday that I could not find the proposed ordinance prior to its meeting. Tuesday afternoon, after the Zoning Commission meeting, I again tried to find the draft ordinance on city web sites, but was unable to. Wednesday morning, I easily found the draft. Hence, I believe the draft was posted Tuesday night.

Is that sufficient public notice? In a practical sense, obviously no, but the Infrastructure Committee accepted Mr. Sanchez's statement without question or criticism.

"2. Neighborhood and neighborhood association input typically occurs at the rezoning case stage, as opposed to the UDC amendment stage."

Critique: Read this again. Mr. Sanchez states his opinion that citizens and citizen groups should not have an input to UCD amendments, only to how amendments may be applied in specific zoning cases. Amazing. Does this help explain why the draft ordinance was not made publically available until after the Zoning meeting?

"3. The military was aware of the ordinance being drafted, but may not have seen the ongoing updated versions. To develop the first drafts, the County's Order was used as a guide. It was apparent what the military's goals were, so the citizen review team's task was to serve as a technical committee to take the first drafts and make suggestions to make it a workable, enforceable ordinance within San Antonio."

Critique: At the Zoning meeting on Tuesday, Mr. Reidinger, the Army representative from Fort Sam, stated that he was unaware that there was a proposed city ordinance or that it would be placed before the Zoning Commission until Bill Bourne of Scenic San Antonio alerted him. Obviously, the ordinance had not been creditably coordinated with the Army, but the Infrastructure committee did not question or criticize Mr. Sanchez on this point.

“4. Comments were received from the JLUS consultant, and discussions occurred at the JLUS advisory committee meetings (particularly the day of the work group projects). Waiting for JLUS completion would change the directed timeline for the ordinance adoption.”

Critique: That comments were received from the JLUS consultant is probably a true statement, but it would be nice to hear directly from the JLUS consultant what those comments were. Also, this statement begs the question of who directed the timeline for ordinance adoption.

“5. Zoning amendments to the UDC are not required to be heard by the TAC or the Planning Commission, but rather the Zoning Commission. Other types of UDC amendments may be heard by TAC and Planning, but not Zoning. We have taken amendments to all commissions/committees in the past as a courtesy, but not as a requirement. If we had taken this one to TAC and Planning, we would not have met the directed timeline. Additionally, the technical citizen review team served as an expert committee on the specifics of the draft.”

Critique: I’m going to have to defer to the Zoning Commission on this one. By unanimous vote, it stated that the draft ordinance should go thru the TAC. It would be interesting to hear if it is swayed by Mr. Sanchez’s arguments.

So the above is my critique of Mr. Sanchez’s representations at the Infrastructure and Growth committee on Wednesday, November 20th. Did he lie? Allow me to answer this way. I do not have proof that he did, but perhaps you will understand why I say I sure would not want to buy a used car, or a proposed ordinance, from him.

Elected officials should demand accountability from city staff, and citizens should do likewise with elected officials, but my observation is that San Antonio staff and elected officials are increasingly insulated and unfriendly to inputs and oversight from neighborhoods and citizens.

I am seeing too many cases when ‘directed timelines’ are created to justify closed, ‘fast track’, ‘back room’ dealings, apparently to the benefit of private interests. This does not engender trust. This is not what I call good government.

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