

2010 Year in Review

The last year has been very active and engaging at City Hall.

It started with the CPS nuclear project NRG to expand the Bay City plant with NRG. While I am supportive of nuclear energy as a clean alternative to hydrocarbon electric power generation, the financial deal was just not good for the CPS rate payers. The City Council's primary task in relationship to CPS is to approve the rates charged our citizens. The project as proposed by CPS and NRG simply imposed too much risk on our rate payers. Fortunately, we were able to extract CPS from the project with a residual interest for our investment, secure a critical rate increase which maintained the financial strength of CPS, and hire an experienced and highly qualified CEO, Doyle Beneby. This was all facilitated by one of our own District 8 citizens, Charles Foster. Mr. Foster assumed the Chairman of the Board position and was directly responsible for an excellent settlement with NRG, a justified rate increase, and the selection of a new CEO. CPS is on the right track and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Charles.

San Antonio has fared much better than most cities our size during the latest recession and the arduous recovery period we are currently experiencing. The major factor has been the investment made by the military to consolidate military medical training at Fort Sam Houston. Combat medics from all military branches will be trained at Fort Sam Houston because of Camp Bullis. Camp Bullis is an excellent field training facility located in close proximity to Fort Sam Houston allowing classroom and field training to be effectively coordinated. To protect the mission at Camp Bullis, the Council passed a series of ordinances which includes (1) the 20% slope rule to preserve habitat in the hill country, (2) the dark skies ordinance which allowed realistic night training, (3) the sound attenuation ordinance which provided sensible sound construction restrictions, and (4) the regional habitat plan which will provide a process to facilitate development while preserving sensitive habitat. The future of Camp Bullis is now secure to support and grow Fort Sam Houston's military mission.

San Antonio has had a series of tree ordinances over the last 20 years. However, our citizens continued to be alarmed with the impact of development on our natural landscape. The concern focused on old growth trees referred to as heritage trees and the preservation of large stands of trees which provided ecologically and atmospheric benefits to the community. The process was extremely difficult for all the parties. Environmentalists believe that they did not accomplish their environmental objectives and the developers believe that they lost property rights. However, the Council was able to forge a compromise which encourages thoughtful development by placing a higher value on trees and especially on heritage trees, and assuring the preservation or reestablishment of a sustainable tree canopy.

Another controversial issue followed close on the heels of the tree ordinance. Again, San Antonio had a smoking ordinance, but citizens were concerned that the ordinance failed to protect smokers and nonsmokers against second hand smoke. The pivotal point to me was protection of the workers who are continuously subjected to second hand smoke. A serious attempt to ban smoking in numerous outside venues where it is not proven that second hand smoke is a hazard was dropped. We now have an ordinance which bans smoking in all indoor public facilities assuring all workers protection from second hand smoke.

The financial condition of the City continues to be strong due to the excellent fiscal leadership of our City Manager, Sheryl Sculley. The budget is balanced. The tax rate has not been increased. We carry a strong cash reserve into each fiscal year and have the top credit rating with all the major rating agencies.

In District 8, the most pressing problem is transportation. Our district continues to grow even in this difficult economic period. While we have three 2007 Bond projects under construction on Prue Road, DeZavala and Babcock, we have pressing needs across the District. I am hopeful that we will be able to have a successful bond election in 2012 which will provide capital funds to continue improving the roads of our District. The linear parkway system continues to grow in our District and the sales tax increment was renewed to expand the trail system in addition to protecting critical recharge areas over the Edwards Aquifer.

While growth has continued in District 8, zoning conflicts have been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties with two exceptions. First, the result of the negotiations with the owners of the proposed Porsche Dealership has been very disappointing. I will continue to reach out to their representative in an effort to secure the restrictions which I expected. Second, one property was not allowed to increase their density from residential to multifamily in the UTSA area. This area has experienced a very aggressive expansion of multifamily housing. Our neighbors around UTSA are having a difficult time adjusting this explosive growth. We will continue to work with developers to mitigate the impact on our neighbors as UTSA grows.

While many more events of note occurred over the last year, I have limited my review to issues in which I have been directly involved and impacts our neighbors in District 8. As you can imagine, I could go on about the SAWS rate structure and increase, the expansion of our airport, the plans for enhanced bus service to our District, the completion of the intersection improvements, and the numerous new firms locating in our District from outside of San Antonio, but I am out of space. Please remember you can always just give me a call on my cell phone which is 488-3322 if you would like to chat further about the City or our District.

Reed Williams
District 8 Councilman