

Martha Alvarez

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Sent: Monday, January 25, 2021 4:35 PM
To: List - City Council
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Work Plan

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Councilmembers:

All the projects in your work plan are well and good, but frankly none of those I particularly see are going to make an appreciable difference in my quality of life vis-a-vis the city, nor do I expect a significant number of residents would feel differently.

Here's a list of things I wish you would work on:

1) Staff oversight and accountability. You folks seem afraid to challenge staff or make them step up when they are not attending to the basics, or doing something that make little sense or not deploying the "discretion" one expects. Nor do you folks seem to, on your own, identify things that need corrected, nor do you seem to follow-up when you email staff on behalf of a resident--like emailing staff is a great accomplishment. Maybe some day you can explain this attitude to me. In reading Tom LaBonge's recent obit, I was wondering why we don't ever seem to have any councilmembers that display that concern for the everyday.

2) Better budget process to engage the community. You have used the same general ledger style budget process than provides little useful information to the average resident. Now that Henry's gone, maybe you might bring this process into the 21st Century so those that would like to be engaged don't need to have a 45-year tenure with the city to understand objectives. This needs to be more program-based, instead of department based, with empirical accountability measures beyond statistical "factoids" (who cares how many miles of streets we have?). Tell me instead how many net trees we are going to plant over baseline. Also in particular, there needs to be resident engagement whenever there are supplemental funds available--including even the most basic of transportation/road-related funds. To ask PPIC to "research transportation alternatives" while you go ahead and use special transportation funds for an unnecessary Sepulveda resurfacing is ludicrous; to talk park enhancements while using special parks funds for equipment replacements is poor strategy.

3) Better monitoring of conditions in our parks, etc. I heard one person running for council say that the reason our city seemed shabby was because of the COVID challenges. To, me, it only became shabbier because of COVID challenges. There is no reason why the Sand Dune greenbelt has been a swamp for the last 3 months. There are still weeds growing inside the Pacific/Veterans Parkway water fountain that I told you about at the beginning of November. Last March I told Steve and Bruce about foliage growing over the sidewalk at 1212 Ardmore, and that's still there. Other sidewalk obstructions identified at the same time took to August and September to be remedied (during a time when people were really out and about). Staff ignores street corners obscured by foliage (even down streets they go everyday, like Blanche). There are too many signs, on too many poles, that are also faded or obscured and not being attended to. No one seems to be monitoring street sweeping for quality (and why that was discontinued in 2020 on streets without parking is beyond me).

4) Code Enforcement and other respect for rules. The rules we agree among ourselves are good keep us together as a community. Those that try to keep to the rules are then estranged from those that don't. The current "if I don't think its a problem; it does get fixed" council philosophy is flawed. We need enforcement or at least better education on things like parking, leaf blowers, and tree care. That you only enforce leaf blowers/tree care against the vendor and not the home owner is ridiculous. Recent actions by the council itself act against a respect for government. Whether parklets should be opened is something negotiated with the county--not something that defies the county. Saying you would gladly cut the chains that were on the pier is not the message that should be sent by a councilman. Saying that you aren't going to enforce a law that is on the books is confusing. If you don't like something another government is doing to our city, then the council knows the appropriate mechanisms that should be employed to effect change. Sorry for being so "law and order," but to me this is the discipline that holds a community together. If the rules are bad or unworkable, change them. Otherwise, enforce them.

5) Better Transparency. Too often community members are taken by surprise. That does not build community. You don't seem to deploy the proper outreach for things as a politician you know needs outreach (and the staff report outreach paragraphs are a waste of time given that they are CYA at best). In fact, I would say that staff shows a decided lack of concern often on how an activity might impact residents' feelings that the city is working with them and is thinking about their needs. You often see the most resident-impacting items buried in a Staff Report, or obscured by a misleading staff report title. The Sepulveda Hotel, the North End trees, and the brown water from flushing are just a few recent items from NextDoor where lack of engagement or notice are evident. Shutting down transit across the Sand Dune greenbelt and the Live Oak 17th stairs during the early days of the crisis are other indications of unconcern with needs of residents, as were the heavy park fines and the lack of effort in regulating Ocean Drive or making roads more family or bike-friendly. As another transparency example, there is an item in the Staff Report called "Municipal Code Transparency Enhancements" that is lacking in transparency in the meeting materials as to what actually this is. As someone who tries to keep up with things, I've never heard of this before.

6) Reduced marketing. Staff seems to take forever to get things done. Don't blame COVID--this is something that existed pre-COVID. One reason I think this happens is because they want too much show and too little substance. As an example, I would point to the 42 graphically enhanced workplan items at this current meeting that are totally unnecessary, or the 15 pages of non-park photographs in the non-Internet-friendly handout for the recent Parks Master Plan document. Same with signs--every time there seems to be an a problem or initiative, it seems the city's answer is a sign (yet you can't even get a mask sign over MBB, because a sidewalk sale is more important than COVID containment). Stop with the excessive signage. Frankly, in most cases the only person it makes a difference to is the one that wanted it hung.

7) Try to show that City Government's concerns is more than just supporting Downtown Manhattan Beach and city employee salaries and benefits. You give way too much authority to the Chamber and DBBPA representatives (and at times, North End) without evincing a counterbalanced concern for residents as a whole, or even other businesses than downtown businesses.

I've written about these things before (as well as a few others), so I'm not expecting much.

I appreciate any consideration.

Regards,
Gary Osterhout