

Minutes of the Visioning Session held October 15, 2011 at 8:00 a.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Lopez Rogers and Council Members

Jim McDonald, Vice Mayor
Jim Buster
Stephanie Karlin
Frank Scott
Charles Vierhout
Ken Weise

ALSO PRESENT

Charlie McClendon, City Manager
David Fitzhugh, Assistant City Manager
Rogene Hill, Assistant City Manager
Pier Simeri, Community Relations and Public Affairs Director
Andrew McGuire, City Attorney
Carmen Martinez, City Clerk

1) ROLL CALL BY THE CITY CLERK

2) CITY COUNCIL VISIONING EXERCISE

City Council will review the Vision for the City they developed during their retreat held in 2006 and will reaffirm or modify it as needed. For information, discussion and direction.

Mayor Lopez Rogers thanked everyone for attending today's meeting. She indicated that the City Council last held a visioning session in 2006.

The City Council looked back at the visioning session held in the year 2006 to set the framework for the future of the city. At that time, the economy was booming and things were very different. Council reviewed the qualities that the 2006 Council admired about Avondale, and then offered their own. Council Member Karlin said she likes the City's vision. Council Member Weise agreed, adding that Avondale is good about looking for new and neglected opportunities and developing them. Avondale cannot be afraid to take chances. Council Member Scott said he likes that Council works together, that the City has a professional staff, and that they value customer service. Avondale has not enjoyed a more cohesive Council than it has right now. Each Council Member thinks differently, but takes into account the opinions of the others. Mayor Lopez Rogers said that the makeup of the Council has changed over the years but not the vision.

Vice Mayor McDonald commented that both the Council and Staff have shown fiscal responsibility, and even during the economic downturn managed to add money to General Fund while sticking to its vision. Mr. McClendon said the list of cities that did not raise taxes in some way during the downturn is very short. Mayor Lopez Rogers said Avondale has affordable housing, but should concentrate now on improving diversity of housing choices. Council Member Weise commented on a recent flyover he did over Avondale and said the southern part of the city offers opportunities for diverse housing like no other city in the area.

Ms Simeri reviewed the goals that Council established during the 2006 visioning session. Vice Mayor McDonald noted that progress has been made on every one of the goals. Council Member Karlin disagreed somewhat, noting that because of the economic

downturn, Council has not been able to meet the citizens' expectations on quality of life, housing, cultural, entertainment, and recreation as much as desired. The emphasis on economic development has meant that the Parks and Recreation Department has taken a hit. Parks are the types of assets that bring families and communities together. This in turn opens the door to economic development, because businesses are more likely to relocate to cities where the quality of life is high. Council Member Weise felt that for the next year at least, the focus has to remain directly on economic development, since that is what will bring in money the fastest. Maybe in a year, the situation will improve and Council's attention can turn to other important matters.

Mayor Lopez Rogers said that small businesses are crucial to Avondale and it is important for the city to help grow them. When the economy was booming, it was easy to think big and try to attract large developments, but now that reality has set in, Avondale is better off focusing on small businesses. The 2006 Council noted that Avondale's small town feel was an attractive aspect of the community, but those things depend on making sound quality of life choices. In order for Avondale to continue to be a community that people choose to live in, Council has to focus on providing young families with the assets they want in a community.

Council Member Buster agreed with the previous comments, but said Avondale cannot forget the value of big employers. Outlying communities in other metropolitan areas have attracted employers by emphasizing the availability of open land and proximity to transportation. That said, the competition for big employers is fierce, and there is definite value in going after smaller businesses that employ 30 to 50 people, rather than just the big ones. Mayor Lopez Rogers noted that even if big companies are attracted to neighboring communities with more open land, they need smaller support businesses to thrive, and Avondale can fill that niche.

Council Member Karlin added that big employers are also attracted to areas that have a good workforce. Workforce training and education should be an area of emphasis. Mayor Lopez Rogers stated that families are attracted to close-knit communities. This is something Avondale has done well, even as it continues to grow. Sustainability is another aspect that needs to be emphasized.

Vice Mayor McDonald noted that successful urban centers feature main streets with housing above retail, and medium size businesses directly behind them. Just as important as attracting new businesses will be figuring out how to put all the pieces together effectively. He advised exploring ways to get business owners together socially to share their ideas and work together on new initiatives. Council Member Weise said people would not move to Avondale if they did not think it would provide them with a good quality of life. In 2006, other cities were receiving all the positive attention, but today, Avondale is perceived as being one of the best run cities in the West Valley. The economic downturn has forced Council to act outside their comfort zone. He encouraged Council to continue taking chances without neglecting fiscal responsibility. Rather than always going for a home run, the city should recognize the importance of singles and doubles as well.

Mayor Lopez Rogers suggested a greater emphasis on marketing Avondale's assets as a good place to live. Charlie McClendon commented that staff has been working on getting

stories about Avondale in national publications. Council Member Vierhout said Avondale should strive to bring in the types of services and jobs that its citizens are looking for. The 2010 census shows that the average age is 29 and 50% of the population are Hispanic.

Council Member Weise felt that by improving educational opportunities Avondale could enhance its image in the eyes of employers. All employers research test scores and school rankings. Great strides have been made with the Ambassador Program. New private schools have helped bring up the scores, but their fees are too high for many people. The City must play a role in enhancing education at all levels. Mayor Lopez Rogers agreed that education and training is a concern for the entire West Valley. Mr. McClendon said the City Center aims to tackle that problem by first focusing on housing choices that attract high-earning demographic groups that are not the primary focus of schools. Once that money is in the community, it is easier to generate better funding to help the schools. Council Member Vierhout said after-school programs can be used to enhance the core curricula in fun ways that will attract more children to learning. Council Member Weise suggested incorporating those training programs desired by companies into educational offerings.

Assistant City Manager Rogene Hill commented that schools have struggled with math scores, because most of the teachers themselves are not comfortable with math. One idea is to start a summer program to help teachers bolster their math skills. Vice Mayor McDonald said many businesses owners want to contribute to their communities and it would be helpful if they could directly inspire young people to learn the skills that will be needed by area employers. He also suggested using social media to spread a positive message about Avondale's activities and accomplishments.

Council Member Karlin encouraged a City program to encourage local business people and professionals to volunteer their time to share their skills and experience. Assets like the Community Garden and the Sports Center attract people from outside Avondale and enhance the city's image in the region. Council Member Vierhout explained that the City of Mesa offers its iMesa app that allows citizens to put up ideas for other citizens to vote on. The top vote getting ideas can be introduced to Council.

Mayor Lopez Rogers stated that Council has the vision to realize that they need to be directly involved in order to get the business community involved. Council Member Scott said small businesses generally employ people from their community. Small business owners want to get involved in their city because they realize that demonstrating good citizenship is good business practice. He felt Avondale is perceived as a forward thinking, innovative community willing to try out new ideas. Many cities, for instance, offered a four-day work week to employees after Avondale demonstrated it could work well. Budget-wise, Avondale was ahead of the game and avoided many of the problems that other cities endured during the recession. Outsourcing is smart business, and the way of the future. He said he is proud to tell people he is from Avondale.

Ms Simeri reviewed the headlines that the Council prepared in 2006 as part of that visioning session and compared to some actual headlines that have appeared in the local newspapers recently.

Council Member Weise commented that it is impressive to see how many of the headlines Council prepared in 2006 have actually become reality in some form or another.

Mayor Lopez Rogers said that when people decide what city they want to live in, they consider the beauty of the place itself, both the natural environment and the aesthetics of the community. They also look at the ease with which they can meet others and make friends, the level of acceptance, the equality of opportunities, and the degree to which people can contribute to and take pleasure in the community.

Mr. McClendon said the General Plan update focuses on four key areas, City Center, the freeway corridor, the residential areas of south Avondale, and the revitalization of Old Town. The implementation of the vision for the City Center has been consistent over the last five years. Mayor Lopez Rogers said the dense development planned for the City Center should be designed to attract high income professionals with no children. It should feature high quality housing for those who are interested in a certain type of lifestyle. Vice Mayor McDonald suggested that Avondale could charge a fee for parking at a City Center facility that is built with federal funding. That revenue could be used to fund other projects.

Council Member Karlin said that the City Center plan has to consider not just housing but all the other amenities that people would want to walk to, including grocery stores, nightlife, and restaurants. Council Member Weise said that for City Center to work, it has to attract people from a broader area. The Sports Center is a good example of this. Development in City Center should attract activity from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m. Mr. McClendon stated that in order for the City's revenue to increase, either the salaries of people already living here have to increase, or the population does. Council Member Buster inquired about the types of development that would bring people down to City Center all day. Mr. McClendon explained that development would have to be very diverse. Offices bring people in the daytime, and restaurants/entertainment will bring them there at night. A couple of large regional draws would also help.

Mr. McClendon turned to discussing the freeway corridor. Avondale has a limited number of places that can be used for a large regional distribution center, and one of them is on this corridor. It would also be a good area for smaller businesses that support a large employer. Little residential is planned for the corridor beyond what is already in place. Mixed use and multi-family residential can fit into this area as well. He noted that not all developers believe in the City's vision.

Mayor Lopez Rogers responded that the problem is that the City sees the freeway corridor as offering a pristine development environment, but the developers do not see the same thing. City Council has to assure developers that they have a plan for the area, and are committed to it. Council Member Weise agreed, adding that Avondale is willing to wait for the right kind of quality development to come along, and will not simply accept any development for the sake of development. City Council is committed to building what is best for Avondale, even if it takes longer to do so, and Council has to support staff when they encounter developer resistance to the plan.

Assistant City Manager David Fitzhugh noted that developers, without exception, have been challenged by the open space requirements at the Lakin Ranch property that are

there by default, including the power lines and the Durango Channel. In order for them to make money, they need a certain amount of density. It will be challenging, especially in the current economy, to find the right developer that can make that property work. Council Member Karlin said as transportation costs continue to increase, the urban agriculture trend will continue to grow and noted that Lakin Ranch could be an ideal place for it. Mayor Lopez Rogers felt that it would not bring in enough money to attract developers. City Attorney Andrew McGuire commented the corridor is also challenged by the limitations that APS and SRP place on the type of infrastructure that can be built on their easements. The biggest problem is impatience on the part of developers. City Council can help staff by reinforcing the message that the City is willing to wait for the right type of development.

Council Member Vierhout questioned whether allowing more residential development near PIR could eventually jeopardize the raceway in the way that Luke Air Force Base is currently threatened by encroaching development. The builders will not have to deal with residents complaining about noise, but the City will. Mr. McClendon acknowledged that PIR is concerned about that as well. Council Member Vierhout said powerline corridors are suitable for horse trails that could be attractive amenities for large lot residential neighborhoods.

Council Member Buster said it is good that Avondale has a plan for the area just like it has one for the City Center, but he cautioned against completely ignoring market realities. The ideas for City Center are coming to fruition more or less. He encouraged Council to allow for some flexibility in the freeway corridor. Mayor Lopez Rogers responded that a change in plans at this point could create conflicts that would be hard to resolve later on. Council Member Buster agreed on the need for larger lots and a buffer zone, but felt that if developers still do not show interest in the area after ten years, it would be time to consider a different course of action. The City Center vision has been adjusted to market realities without losing its spirit, and Avondale should employ that same attitude in other areas. Council Member Scott agreed that some flexibility to allow for market realities is desirable. He would not want to tie the hands of future Councils. The Council's flexibility has saved some projects in the past.

Mr. McGuire noted that one bright spot in S.B. 1525 is that it now allows Avondale to charge development fees for stormwater in a way that was not possible previously. These are the kinds of things that the City could be flexible on without scrapping the vision that was established in the land use plan. He also reported that S.B. 1598, a regulatory reform bill, now requires that the entire river bed be shown on Avondale's General Plan as potential aggregate mining areas.

Council Member Weise noted that the Lakin property already has large home lots sprinkled throughout, and the City's plan develops synergy with them. Mayor Lopez Rogers stated that for the City to get what it wants in the southern residential area, it might need to have some skin in the game. Council Member Scott said the sewer and water connections to PIR gives the City an asset to bargain with developers. Council Member Weise added that the City also is making other infrastructure improvements in the south that would benefit anyone who wants to develop there. Mr. McGuire added that tools like the Community Facilities District will be available when the market is ready to build.

Ms Hill stated that Avondale has to be able to prove to developers that if development is built according to the plan, then people will come. Council Member Weise commented that there once was a time when developers felt that Avondale was only good for fast food restaurants and convenience stores. Mayor Lopez Rogers added that Avondale has learned that if it wants quality development, it had to do something to make it happen. Mr. McGuire noted that Avondale has a track record that proves the city can step up to meet quality development when it presents itself.

Mr. McClendon said the City is at a crossroads when it comes to Old Town Avondale. There is increasing evidence that housing has to be addressed there, not just the businesses on Western Avenue. Council Member Karlin said business owners have expressed concern about the high crime rate not only in their area, but in the nearby neighborhoods. Avondale has invested millions of dollars on landscaping and infrastructure on Western Avenue, but some businesses that located there have not worked out. What can be done to recruit and retain businesses there? Is it safety or parking? Mayor Lopez Rogers said much of the problem lies in perception. Many of the residents there are older and live in older homes. The perception is that because of the housing there, businesses cannot succeed. How can houses that were not built well in the first place be refurbished? Council Member Buster said the solution might require establishing some type of mixed use district in those neighborhoods.

Council Member Weise said Council has tried to mold Old Town Avondale into something they believe it should be, but the residents who live there do not necessarily know what it should be. The neighborhood is large and has many issues. Code enforcement has improved things, and the crime rate is lower. Businesses will locate there if they see a demographic that will allow them to succeed. People have to be given a reason to live there. Council should take time in the next six months to focus on finding solutions to the problem in Old Town.

Council Member Karlin noted that Phoenix lacks a mercado destination like those found in Los Angeles, where people can go to find Mexican goods and foods. Creating a focal point for that kind of activity might be one way to revitalize the area. Council Member Weise encouraged the idea of Old Town becoming a place that people would want to linger in. That is how it will develop. Mayor Lopez Rogers felt that Western Avenue will not flourish until something is first done with the surrounding neighborhoods. Council Member Buster agreed that the mercado idea is fine, but the area needs people there who can sustain it. It will be hard to rely only on people going there for only a short while.

Council Member Vierhout suggested the City offer public/private partnerships with residents who want to improve their homes and live in Old Town. Mayor Lopez Rogers questioned whether Avondale wants to build the same type of housing there and suggested developing a master plan for the area. Council Member Scott felt that the City should have bought the blocks on either side of Western Avenue and just started over. The new library draws ten times what the old one did. The City has to determine what is salvageable and what is not. Some places are a lost cause, while others can be saved. He questioned why the City should invest resources in something that is not salvageable.

Council Member Weise stated that Avondale has many areas that need investment, but a limited pool of money. Lots of money was spent on Old Town. At some point, the residents there have to decide that the neighborhood is worth saving. Mayor Lopez Rogers responded that many other people in Avondale have opportunities, but some in Old Town do not. As the heart of Avondale, it should not be left to die. A master plan would help identify the areas that can be saved and those that are lost causes. If the City is going to invest in City Center and Estrella Foothills, it has to invest in Old Town as well. Council Member Weise agreed that Old Town should not be left to die. Investments have been made and more are needed. He clarified that the City should be judicious in how it spends money there, since the coffers are not full and the economy is bad.

Council Member Buster agreed that Old Town is an asset, but the City cannot focus on it to the exclusion of other areas. New people are needed down there, and Avondale should consider new product and housing options. The manufactured housing industry might have unique products that could be used to create infill that would look better than what is there now. No builder is going to want to work on one house at a time. Something like Ranch Market would be a good fit for the area. If more people can be encouraged to live there, it has a future. Mayor Lopez Rogers said if something can be done to improve the streetscapes, then residents will be encouraged to make their own improvements. Council Member Buster agreed.

Council Member Scott said Cashion has done a great job revitalizing itself and that was made possible because of the City's help. A plan is needed to convince citizens what can be done. Mayor Lopez Rogers suggested that the City establish links of communication directly with the residents of Old Town. Council Member Weise felt that the best plan would be to focus on two blocks on either side of Western. As those seeds begin to sprout, it would have a positive effect on the rest of the neighborhood. Vice Mayor McDonald agreed that if the residents know that the City wants to help, they will be more willing to improve the area. He cautioned that it would not be a quick process. If the residents do not want to change, the City cannot help. Ms Hill noted that Old Town qualifies for federal grant funding and that Avondale does not have to pay for improvements alone.

Council Member Scott said the City owns property in Old Town that could be used for strategic development when the economy improves, such as housing above retail. Council Member Weise called Western Avenue a gem that needs polishing. Even if the residents take an active interest in improving the neighborhood, it will take decades to complete the work. Mayor Lopez Rogers noted that many Old Town residents have a lot of pride and are not interested in outside help. The language barrier also complicates the problem. Financially, the residents cannot afford expensive repairs. In order for Avondale to build up the new part of the city, the older areas have to come along with it.

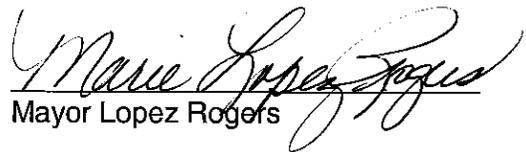
Mr. McClendon said Council would revisit this problem in more depth at a work session, and staff would present options for the strategic use of limited resources. If the private sector can see the City making investments in the area, they might be encouraged to do their part as well. Council Member Karlin felt that a rail stop in Old Town would help revitalize the area. Mayor Lopez Rogers requested an update on regional rail projects.

Mayor Lopez Rogers invited Council to share headlines they would like to see written about Avondale over the next ten years. Council offered the following responses:

- Avondale pioneers business owner community involvement
- Avondale's City Center is a model for economic development
- Avondale secures its position as the Valley's leader in youth and amateur sports
- Avondale voted one of the most innovative cities in the nation
- Renaissance along Western Avenue
- Small business booms in Avondale
- Avondale known for creativity and innovation
- Avondale is the number one quality community of choice

3) ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Council, Vice Mayor McDonald moved to adjourn the visioning session. Council Member Karlin seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.


Marie Lopez Rogers


Carmen Martinez, CMC
City Clerk

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Visioning Session of the Council of the City of Avondale held on the 15th day of October 2011. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that the quorum was present.


Carmen Martinez
City Clerk