

Minutes of the Work Session held February 13, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mayor Lopez Rogers and Council Members

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

**ALSO PRESENT**

Charlie McClendon, City Manager  
David Fitzhugh, Assistant City Manager  
Gina Montes, Neighborhood and Family Services Director  
Ernesto Fonseca, Old Town Revitalization Coordinator  
Pier Simeri, Community Relations Director  
Roby Lloyd, Chief Information Officer  
Dan Davis, Economic Development Director  
Chase Carlile, Economic Development Intern  
Andrew McGuire, City Attorney  
Carmen Martinez, City Clerk

**1) ROLL CALL BY THE CITY CLERK**

**2) REVITALIZATION UPDATE – OLD TOWN AVONDALE**

Gina Montes, Neighborhood and Family Services Director, introduced Ernesto Fonseca as Avondale's Old Town Revitalization Coordinator. She said Mr. Fonseca has 17 years of experience in housing, community engagement, economic development, planning, construction management, program design, and grant writing. He was most recently a Project Manager at Arizona State University's Stardust Center. As a licensed architect, he specializes in energy performance, climate responsive architecture, and sustainability. He has a Master's degree in Building Design, and is pursuing a PhD in Environmental Design and Planning.

Mr. Fonseca provided an update on Avondale's revitalization efforts in Old Town. The Business Renovation Program, designed to improve the facades and buildings on Western Avenue, was recently completed. The Avon Theater received new lighting, electrical work, paint, and a marquee sign that complies with the theater's historic sign. The Keepsake Trophy building received new signage and paint, while the existing mural was left alone. The Kreative K cupcakes building looks much different now with new windows, doors, paint, signage, lighting, and a canopy. The Michelle's Bridals building was in bad shape, but was redesigned completely to match the character of Old Town. As each building is finished, it helps to change the image of the historic district.

Mr. Fonseca said small business development activities are particularly important in Old Town. The goal of the program is to serve as a liaison to the City and provide training and contacts to lending entities. Nearly every department in the City is collaborating. To increase the visibility of Old Town, the program suggests rebranding the district as Historic Avondale. Many people in the Valley do not know where the heart of Avondale is located,

making it of prime importance to market this area. The word "old" connotes something that has outlived its usefulness, whereas "historic" suggests value.

Mr. Fonseca stated that Avondale cannot simply wait for businesses to come to the historic district. Cities must partner with businesses to attract them to their communities, since many municipalities are vying for their attention. Several small businesses have visited the area and are considering moves. Avondale secured a grant to help businesses become more energy efficient. The grant will pay for energy audits that will let them know what changes they need to make to save energy and money. Public art will increase the neighborhood's visibility, walkability, and livability. Art has been used for centuries to beautify streets and buildings. The program is applying for grants to implement an arts program that has proven successful in other Valley cities.

Mr. Fonseca said sustainability is not just about energy efficiency and recycling; it is about combining health, comfort and resource management. When it comes to housing, the program will not just address the building by itself, but work to create a healthier home environment altogether.

Council Member Weise said shoppers typically do not stop to notice the architecture of modern retail stores because they just see them as places to get something done. The storefronts in older neighborhoods, however, offer a window into the souls of individual businesses. People cannot help but look into the windows to see what is inside. If shoppers see rundown buildings, they are less likely to return. Old Town Avondale cannot expect to draw people simply on history alone. The library and several successful businesses are a great start, but that is not enough. The area needs regional or national brand name establishments that will draw consumers, preferably into the evening hours.

Council Member Weise pointed to Phoenix's Willo District as an example of what is possible for Historic Avondale. Government cannot be the solution to every problem, but incentivizing business owners to do something with their buildings would instill pride and give residents a starting point from which to expand. He encouraged the pursuit of sponsorships and grants for that purpose.

Council Member Buster said the new facades would encourage others to make improvements. Rebranding the district is critical, as historic places are worth rediscovering. Mr. Fonseca said the rebranding effort could begin right away by changing the name in every applicable document and sign. A concerted marketing would also help. Just a few national businesses can make a big difference.

Council Member McDonald said critics complained about the changes made to Western Avenue at the start of the revitalization effort, but the corridor is beautiful now that the trees have grown. It takes some people a while to get used to change. Avondale must actively pursue the types of businesses it wants to see in Historic Avondale. It took the Willo District 20 years to reach its current state. If Avondale remains diligent, eventually Historic Avondale's revitalization will accelerate.

Council Member Vierhout agreed that the facades are beautiful and that rebranding is a good idea. It will take a long time to achieve the dream, but each year can make a difference.

Vice Mayor Karlin said she has been involved in the revitalization process since the 1990s. The effort has been challenging because of past crime and safety issues. The library has created energy on Western Avenue, and it is an opportune time for other businesses to join. She inquired whether any studies have been done to determine why people are reluctant to go to Western Avenue. Mr. Fonseca responded that he is unaware of any studies specifically for Avondale, but studies for other cities indicate that most people are unaware that historic districts exist in their communities. Attracting the right businesses will increase public awareness of the area.

Council Member Scott said he has seen many ideas for Western Avenue since the 1980s and likes Mr. Fonseca's approach. Some merchants feel it is the City's job to drive business to Western Avenue, but Council has to think about the city as a whole. Merchants have to help the City help them. Calling the district Historic Avondale is a good step in the right direction. He encouraged Mr. Fonseca to use every tool at the City's disposal.

Mayor Lopez Rogers said Western Avenue is a different place on nights and weekends, than it is on weekdays. There is a lot of vitality and action that many people are unaware of, and it is reminiscent of what the corridor used to be like when it was the only option in town. Going after the types of businesses that will create synergy is admirable. Revitalization of Historic Avondale has been one of the Council's goals for a long time. The housing stock needs new life. Those who spend a lot of time on Western Avenue love the district the way it is, but rebranding it will attract new people. This is a part of Avondale's history that is being carried into the future.

In response to a question from Mayor Rogers, Mr. Fonseca replied that at this point the working group is an internal City group, the Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce or the Hispanic Chamber have been approached regarding development and educational opportunities. The working group is looking to expand housing opportunities for low and middle income families.

### **3) UPDATE TO COUNCIL ON CITY WEBSITE REDESIGN**

Mr. McClendon said staff has been working on a new City website that is more current and easier to use. The City has more interaction with citizens through the website than by any other means, and it is important that the site communicates the City's message.

Pier Simeri, Community Relations Director, said the new website will debut in March. The website is the online face of Avondale, and it is important to make the visitor experience a positive one. The current website was designed in 2002 and slightly updated in 2009. Typically website redesigns occur every three to four years. Civic Plus hosts and manages the website for Avondale, but the City was unable to take advantage of many of the new features they offer because the platform was outdated.

Ms. Simeri said Community Relations realized savings in the 2010 printing budget, and felt it was an opportune time to use that \$15,000 in savings to overhaul the website. Staff conducted a resident survey in spring of 2011. Most found the current site fairly attractive and easy to use, but also saw room for improvement. Internal web analytics revealed that the most visited pages were for the library, the police and for job opportunities. The most frequently typed search entry was "water billing." Most people spent one to two minutes on the website. There were 250,000 page views in 2011.

Staff met with Civic Plus to develop a strategy and set priorities. The design phase began in the winter. Staff is currently in the migration phase and preparing for a March launch. The new website is built on a new platform and will feature a vibrant new look. It is mobile friendly. The homepage features a slide show that incorporates material from Channel 11. An emergency alert system will provide information as necessary. The library is designing a sub-site so that people can access the site directly without having to go through the City's site. Citizens will be able to access forms to report problems such as graffiti, power outages, and potholes. The new website will meet all the legal posting requirements and government transparency trends. Translation options will make the webpage accessible to people from around the world. An FAQ section will provide the most sought after answers. Ms. Simeri gave a brief tour of the new design and layout. She recognized the efforts of Ingrid Melle who has been the project lead and DeAnn Franklin both from the Community Relations Department.

Council Member McDonald said he likes the new look and colors, and the new emergency alert feature. The web changes quickly and the update was long overdue. He suggested the City use alerts to actively provide information to interested parties without requiring them to come to the site. He noted that three of the four tabs on the new website have Shop Avondale included. This lets people know that shopping locally creates jobs locally. A website is often the first impression someone has of a City, so it is important to get it right.

Council Member Weise said the new website is a huge improvement, and stands out among municipal websites. The emergency alert system is an important tool, should a school lockdown become necessary. He suggested incorporating the tagline, "The Heart of Arizona," into the website, since Avondale is the location of Monument Hill. The slideshow should include photos of PIR and the Auto Mall. He encouraged striking a balance between providing citizens with valuable information, without bogging them down too much.

Council Member Vierhout inquired about search engine optimization to ensure Shop Avondale shows up first. Mr. Lloyd explained that there is usually a cost associated with that feature.

Vice Mayor Karlin suggested a feature to make the entire community aware of the events taking place at each school, as opposed to just the parents of a particular school. Ms. Simeri responded that all schools will have their links, and that schools would be responsible for updating their own event information. School events could also be posted on the Community Calendar and Facebook.

Council Member Buster suggested adding pictures of the new facades in Historic Avondale.

Mayor Lopez Rogers said the montage shows what Avondale is about, but felt the site could make a bigger impact by making a single clear statement. The photos should show the community's diversity, which is an asset for Avondale.

#### 4) UPDATE ON AVONDALE'S ONLINE BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Dan Davis, Economic Development Director, said staff has been making efforts to attract new businesses while helping existing businesses succeed. The Shop Avondale Business Directory Program will be going live concurrent with the new City website.

Chase Carlisle, a graduate student at ASU, said Avondale entered into an agreement with WebQA to use a module called ShopQA for the Shop Avondale directory. The directory can be accessed through the webpage, and provides a free resource to citizens. It is a dynamic directory that is maintained by the business community. Business owners are responsible for making sure everything is up to date. The City is not responsible for providing technical support; WebQA is. Shops can post their location, business hours, special offers, sales, newsletters, job opportunities, and link to social media sites. Residents can search businesses by name or category, receive job announcements, and print coupons.

Mr. Carlisle said Shop Avondale currently has about 100 businesses. Staff spread the word about the directory via press releases, print advertisements, the City's Facebook page, the City's website, and through direct contact. The directory is at [www.avondale.org/shopavondale](http://www.avondale.org/shopavondale). Mr. Carlisle provided a tour of Shop Avondale.

Council Member Weise inquired about the City's investment in the directory. Mr. Davis explained that the directory is using the remaining two years of a module initiated by Neighborhood and Family Services. Mr. Carlisle explained that business owners pay no fee at all.

Council Member Weise inquired whether the City had any liability if someone takes issue with a service provided by one of the businesses in the directory. Andrew McGuire explained that the City takes the position that it is simply providing links, and is not responsible for the content of third party business sites or any interaction with those businesses. That is why they cannot directly post on the City's website. Council Member Weise said the directory accomplishes the goal of keeping business in Avondale.

Council Member Vierhout suggested either not showing categories that have no businesses in them, or making a concerted effort to find at least one representative to fill them. Mr. Carlisle explained that businesses decide how they want to categorize themselves. Some features are removable.

Council Member Scott said he asked for a directory three years ago, and is anxious to see how people respond to it. Mayor Lopez Rogers said she appreciates the work that has gone into it, and looks forward to many businesses signing on.

5) ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Council, Council Member Weise moved to adjourn the work session. Council Member McDonald seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

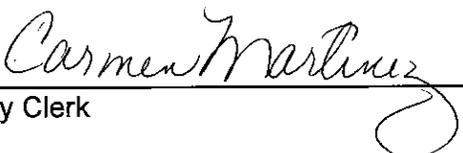
Meeting adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

  
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Mayor Lopez Rogers

  
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Carmen Martinez, CMC  
City Clerk

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Work Session of the Council of the City of Avondale held on the 13th day of February 2012. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that the quorum was present.

  
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City Clerk