

## **COUNCIL MEETS TO DISCUSS PRIORITIES**

The City Council conducted a special Saturday meeting early this month to discuss the establishment of “Council Priorities, Policies and Visions” for 2010-11. Once established, the Council will publish a top 11 list of priorities for increase attention during the current Council term.

“Most legislative bodies are reactive, taking action on matters offered by their city administrations or following up complaints of residents. While that’s an important role, our City Council also wants to be proactive, and especially not lose sight of the bigger picture,” advised Council President Leo Robinson, who had also called Council together on a Saturday in February to do ethics training.

“We’ve attempted to hold ourselves to a higher standard, and let professionalism override politics as usual,” professed Robinson. “Professional bodies take time to consider priorities, review policies and create visions. We’re doing just that with the expectation that we’ll first adopt a set of goals and then we’ll take action over the course of our term to work towards achieving them.”

Councillors offered more than 50 goals, discussing and debating the merits of each to be included on a list of 22 that will next be explored in more depth in the coming weeks. In early April, those 22 will be dropped to the 11 top priorities for the 2010-11 Council.

“This has been an incredibly interesting and, so far, most successful process,” noted Councillor Roseann Bongiovanni. “We need to continue to do more of this type of brainstorming to make sure that the needs of our residents and the views we hold for the future of our city get addressed in a more systematic and holistic manner.”

Topping the list of items the Council wishes to prioritize was making Chelsea cleaner, from less trash on the streets to addressing more code and licensing violations; making the city safer, including addressing prostitution and drug activities, and making City government more administrative sound, from balancing budgets without using reserves to adopting more robust capital improvement plans.

“We’ve talked about a wide range of issues we wish to address that generally fit into the categories of budgeting, policing, quality of life, the physical environment and people. Those are good areas to pull together a wish list, and my colleagues offered a great deal of insight into how our collective wishes might be realized,” offered Councillor Calvin Brown.

The wish list was left with City Manager Jay Ash, who led the discussion as an unbiased facilitator. Ash will spend the next several weeks working with Councillors to prepare a report on what steps are being taken or would need to be taken by the City in order to have a desired impact on each of the priorities.

“A major reason why the City has been so successful is the contribution the City Council has made to its leadership. That leadership was evident Saturday, as Councillors raised thoughtful concerns and worthwhile ideas that together should help all of us focus upon what we need to do together to make the city an even better place,” Ash stated.

This is the second time Council has assembled a list of priorities. The inaugural process in 2008-09 resulted in numerous outcomes, including the implementation of odor control initiatives, the establishment of a Youth Commission, the creation of a new trash plan for households and street sweeping, and an emphasis on trucking enforcement.

“Major items that are influenced by larger societal issues, like eliminating prostitution, obviously take longer to impact,” reasoned Councillor Dan Cortell. “In those situations where we need to continue our focus, we’ll certainly do so. But, there are other areas that are in better shape, so we should consider redirecting our focus to take on other challenges.”

Cortell and his colleagues placed a high priority this past Saturday on continued and expanded ISD enforcement of code violations.

“Our ISD inspectors do a great job, but there is little or no coverage on nights and weekends when many violations are taking place,” explained Cortell. “We’d like to see that coverage expanded, and we’d like to see ISD build further upon the successes they already produce to address such things as overcrowded housing, property code violations, concerns we have around liquor licenses, foreclosures and maintenance plans for properties receiving zoning relief.”

The 11 items adopted as the Council’s top priorities will presumably then turn into action matters for the City Administration, City Council and/or the community-at-large. Robinson expects that some of the items might result in budget initiatives, the realignment of departmental priorities, Council votes on new ordinances or the City’s further outreach and work with its community-based partners.

“A familiar refrain for us is ‘plan the work and work the plan.’ There’s a lot of work that goes into planning and we’re committed to doing that work, and equally as committed to then working even harder to implement our plans,” concluded Robinson.

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