



A LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY: SAN ANTONIO'S CITY GOVERNMENT

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Today I would like to speak about our city's lack of accountability as based on our own experiences with issues such as Mission Trails, the Vista Ridge Pipeline, and Hays Street

Bridge, to name just a few.

In the SA2020 section of Civic Engagement, the city sets out various goals such as having "elected officials and city staff take ownership of issues and are accountable for results" [and] to be "inspired and effective leaders in selfless service to the community... recognized for delivering transparency in government." Our city has failed to produce any of these results.

For example, take the devastating vote on Mission Trails. As many will recall, residents of this community spent hours pleading to city council to place their needs before so-called economic development. While county members demanded that alternative solutions be found to avoid this horrendous displacement, city staff and council ignored those pleas. With a 6-4 vote, council members voted in favor of rezoning the property effectively pushing out over 300 families. Where was the demand for city staff and officials to be held accountable for the fate of these people?

At least with the Mission Trails vote,

there was some sort of conscience –not enough to stop the destruction of this community, but at least enough to show that some council people favor the lives of people over economic development.

On the other hand, for the Vista Ridge Pipeline, the council voted unanimously to fund the project despite the fact that only a few months prior, it was considered to be a bad idea by the SAWS' President. Here we saw the classic scenario— "powerful business leaders urged the council to sign off on the project as a way to ensure job growth, while local environmental groups and advocates for low-income people called it unnecessarily expensive and risky." (Texas Tribune Oct 2014) Citizens demanded that their city officials side with the community and called for environmental justice for Bureson County and for the people of San Antonio. Community folks even asked for a delay in the vote in hopes that city leaders would come to realize the riskiness of such a project, but to no avail. The 3.4 billion dollar pipeline project was approved without even a whimper from city council. Where was the nod of approval for the hard work of community folks asking for effective and responsible government planning?

Finally, I'd like to remind our city leaders and the press about one of the most contested and blatant examples of

this city's lack of ownership, ill decisions and wasteful pursuit of economic development —the Hays Street Bridge struggle. This past year, we witnessed a clear disregard for justice when the city of San Antonio continued with its plan to sell the contested land at 803 N. Cherry next to our dear Hays Street Bridge. Just months prior, the Hays Street Bridge Restoration Group had won the court case citing that the city had indeed breached the original contract regarding the use of the land. Even before going to trial in 2012 —when thousands of San Antonio residents signed petitions and tried to involve themselves in government decisions with a call for a vote— it never happened.

Now, we face a publicly funded lawsuit using taxpayers' dollars aimed at destroying a community-led effort. Where is the transparency? Where is the accountability? Where is democracy?

Today, we organize against this disregard for democracy in San Antonio. We are here to tell city officials & staff that we are disappointed with their lack of accountability and transparency. We expect you to listen to the people, not the lobbyist, corporations, or developers. Stop the illegal and unethical actions that take place at city hall. Use our taxpayer money to honor and care for all people especially those most vulnerable. ■