

Participatory Budgeting means a lot to the People of Vallejo

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Participatory Budgeting

means a lot to the People of Vallejo

By Ravi Shankar

5/21/14

Dear City Manager, Mr. Dan Keen:

Your recent "recommendation" to the Vallejo City Council to suspend Year-3 cycle of PB and change the process at this point has been extremely disappointing at the least and contradicts several of your actions in previous meetings on this key community engagement process in Vallejo.

Fast and furiously, this has generated rumors, undermined PB staff's confidence, performance, morale and communication ... while the Budget Delegates are confused and outraged why the PB-Steering Committee appears to be losing control and appears to be allowing the community voices to be crushed by questionable decisions/actions, partial or mis-representation of facts and closed-door deals, when on record, the City wants TRANSPARENCY at all levels/stages ?

- In

2013, the City Council passed unanimously (7-0 vote) passing Measure-B support resolution to fund PB-Vallejo for 10-years from 2012--2022. HOW CAN YOU "RECOMMEND" THEM TO GO BACK ON THEIR WORD TO THE PEOPLE OF VALLEJO ?

- In

2014, at the Sister City Officers Oath Administration, Mayor Davis admitted he made a mistake on judging PB and gave full credit to Council-member Marti Brown for bringing PB to Vallejo and giving us all a major platform for community engagement and a national recognition in the PBP and National Conferences. HOW CAN YOU "RECOMMEND" THE 3RD YEAR PB TO BE DELAYED, DEFERRED, BE MINIMIZED, CONTRADICTING PREVIOUS ACTIONS ?

- Since

2012, several hundred volunteers and several thousand voters have spent tens of thousands of hours to advance the cause, brain-storm ideas, work with the City officials and choose specific projects much needed by their neighborhoods that the City could not and did not help over the years. HOW CAN YOU "RECOMMEND" THE 3RD YEAR PB TO BE CRUSHED AND DISCOUNTED, CONTRADICTING PRIOR COMMITMENT?

- Already,

the funds from Measure-B has been higher than expected dollar amounts and to project a flat-rate over 10-year period is contrary to reality and facts. Some Vallejo financial experts explained this to the entire Council why this is wrong (accounting-wise) and morally contradicts questionable practices to yield to election campaign contributors at the expense of the PEOPLE OF VALLEJO.

- When

PB won San Francisco, San Jose, Oakland and other City administration's attention for implementation and even won State and National recognition/interest, Vallejo City jumped to embrace the attention, the publicity, goodwill, recognition gained and even want to send their staff to the White House's invitation.

- At

the City Manager's conference, you were proud of Vallejo-'s PB record. HOW CAN YOU "RECOMMEND" THE 3RD YEAR PB TO BE CRUSHED AND DISCOUNTED, CONTRADICTING PRIOR COMMITMENT? IT IS NOT CONSISTENT & IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE OF VALLEJO.

- Instead

of punishing PB with delays/postponements and an unjust reduced budget for 2015, let them be aware of a recent citizen victory ... PB's StVinnie's Garden group handled a vexatious litigant that had hounded the city staff for years has been brought to his knees ... thanks to the amazing PB delegates and the St.Vinnie's Volunteers (Kathy & Lisa).

- We (the people) respectfully and strongly advocate that Alea Gage be recognized publicly as the the Lead, since she actually is more than anyone else at the City Hall (since Ginny Brown and Aseem Mulji of PBP) carry the PB mantle. Nothing against the performance of Will or Alyssa, or even your staff Joanna whom we all like but everyone knows that Alea is the key communicator and effective ambassador for PBSC.

- May we (the people) remind you that all the positive national, state and regional coverage the PB process has brought to Vallejo is priceless? We are confused as to how you can "Recommend" slashing its budget in the 3rd year, when year-1 & 2 were such resounding success beyond a shadow of doubt ? No amount of re-branding dollars spent by the City could have done this much this fast publicity and goodwill, period! Using all the tools at our disposal is a must and PB is one of those tools.

- Even though the voter turnout was "statistically insignificant" to you as our City Manager, the results of increased civic engagement is visible everywhere you look these days in Vallejo. We are confused as to how you can "RECOMMEND" THE 3RD YEAR PB TO BE CRUSHED AND DISCOUNTED, CONTRADICTING PRIOR COMMITMENT? IT IS NOT CONSISTENT & IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE OF VALLEJO.

- If increased civic engagement is a possible threat to anyone's job security or control or authority, then perhaps we need to find a way to lower the fear factor ... or should we say most respectfully", earn your job/respect/support with citizen's confidence" and not getting rid of PB or minimizing PB in cycle-3 and beyond ?

- TRUST
- What else can we citizens do to show staff and your office that we (the People of Vallejo) can be trusted to vote for important key services? It is critical that we bring the best of the Citizens abilities & and City Government's abilities/powers/actions to work for Vallejo's best interests, ALWAYS.

Mr.
Keen, with all due respect and in appreciation of the many good directions you have set for us since taking office in Vallejo, I am sending this personal eMail and appeal to you with the sole request to please RECONSIDER this "recommendation" and not compromise on the one thing that the people have going for them in the city i.e., Participatory Budgeting Platform and its well

deserved \$3 to 4 million dollars/year until 2022 because of the Council/s 2012 choice on record of the 7-0 vote to support PB in 2012-13 with their recommendation to continue this practice till 2022. I apologize to you or anyone in the Council, if any of my words offends or questions your authority, but sincerely have no regrets asking these difficult questions, most respectfully.

I would be very appreciative of your eMail response AND a formal clarification on the above at the next City Council Meeting when PB is on the agenda. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME, CONSIDERATION & ACTION TO SUPPORT WHAT MEANS A LOT TO THE PEOPLE OF VALLEJO.** We all very much appreciate many of your generally good changes and actions at City Hall as our City Manager.

Note: All opinions expressed in the "Primal Scream" column are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Vallejo Independent Bulletin.