

October 24, 2016

TRRG-Ward 6 Co-sponsored Follow-up Meeting to 9/22/16 Event with Mesa Code Compliance Staff

The Ward 6 Community room filled up with over 50 people attending the follow-up meeting. Interested and concerned residents and neighborhood leaders were ready to continue a discussion with City of Tucson leaders and staff, and find out what was learned from the Mesa Code Compliance Staff Event.

Councilman Steve Kozachik introduced our City Manager Mike Ortega, City Attorney Mike Rankin, Assistant City Manager Albert Elias, Interim Director of Environmental Services and General Services Department Carlos De La Torre, Deputy Director of Environmental Services Pat Tapia, and Interim Administrator Michael Wyneken who is heading up the Code Enforcement Division. Other City staff members from Environmental Services and Code Enforcement were also in attendance.

Copies of the follow-up questions TRRG derived from the Mesa Event were available to all in attendance. The questions were given in advance to the City Manager and ES-CE Staff. Mike Ortega started with answering the first question and then proceeded to go through the other questions with additional answers and comments coming from Mike Rankin, Carlos De La Torre, Pat Tapia and Michael Wyneken. Steve Kozachik moderated and asked the attendees to wait until all the questions were answered, and then he would open up the floor for additional questions and comments.

Here is a numbered list of what we learned that corresponds to the follow-up questions:

1. Carlos De La Torre is Interim Director of Environmental Services and General Services Department. Code Enforcement is now a division of that department.
2. Michael Rankin stated that according to our City Charter enforcing City ordinances must go through the City Court system. Tucson cannot hire an independent hearing officer like Mesa. He explained that there are magistrate levels and that he would look at using limited special magistrates. They will also check to see if the City could contract with the Pima County Hearing Officer.

3. There are no software updates yet and the City Manager is looking for opportunities. He is quite aware of the system's limitations.
4. Education of property owners is an important part of the solution. A new Brush and Bulky door hanger has been printed that includes information on code enforcement violations. There will be new homeowner clinics and videos that will also cover property maintenance standards, and responder safety issues associated with properties that need to be cleaned up.
5. Tucson's CE costs \$2.1 million/year. Higher fees like Mesa's will need to be discussed. He has concerns about people who are unable to pay.
6. Tucson CE can make a set policy about time from notice of violation to compliance. Staff visited Mesa for process information.
7. CE should not be only complaint-driven. Ortega emphasized that a code inspector should never discuss with the property owner or renter where the violation report information came from.
8. Ortega seemed OK with keeping zoning code and sign code issues in CE. There was little discussion on this question.
9. Ortega said that, "Ideally, yes" there should be a CE liaison with TPD. Maybe they could assign light duty officers to help with code enforcement.
10. Improvements are planned for Tucson's Code Enforcement website. There is a need to educate homeowners.
11. Ortega thanked us for being concerned about CE Inspector salaries, and gave us a definite "No" answer to this question. Tucson inspectors make from mid-\$30,000 to \$49,000/year. There is a big turnover and they are down 5 positions. They are looking for applicants! Our Code Inspectors make \$4-5 thousand less than Mesa's Code Compliance Officers.
12. Ortega thinks there is opportunity for collection of CE fines. He would rather deal with outside agencies and doesn't want to create a department.
13. This was the last question and asks how can TRRG assist CE? TRRG is part of the solution! Ortega's message is that the City must: (1).Educate, (2).Enforce, (3). Clean-up. Due process will stay the same. CoT will get help cleaning up

properties with inmates-3 crews by the 1st of the year. Time to dust off volunteer programs!

A lively question/answer/discussion continued until 7:30 PM. Resident frustrations dealt primarily with illegal dumping and holding landlords, vacant property owners and management companies accountable-especially for repeat offenses that should go immediately to citation. Lisa suggested getting an education program going at the U of A teaching students to clean up their messes and learn to recycle properly.

Our City Manager is listening and he will present proposals to Mayor & Council in a few weeks. It was nice leaving the meeting feeling hopeful that some change will be made and City Staff is willing to listen. Pat Tapia is already collecting data on the Weeds Courtesy Notification letter that ES starting sending out Oct. 1st and is willing to send that information on to TRRG.