

**The City Manager meets or exceeds all of his goals;**

**the Mayor says that “Galveston is not a dying city. On the contrary, our survival has never been more certain”;**

**Residents Flee the City!**

24 April 2011

Open Letter to City Council:

To recover from the 1900 Storm, the City of Galveston implemented the Commission form of Government, and by 1960, the population had grown 78%. However, in 1960, the City decided that its government was flawed and switched to the City-Manager form of government. From 1960 to 2010 the population declined 29%, so either the City is still trying to recover from Hurricane Carla, in 1961, or the change in the form of government needs to be acknowledged as a failure.

What is the fatal flaw in the City-Manager form of government? The answer is painfully clear in the current crisis! No one is ultimately responsible for the performance of the City. When there is a controversy, the Council blames the City Manager and the City Manager blames the Council, and the voters take sides.

But the real problem runs much deeper than that. Galveston is not blessed with a shared vision, or even competing visions, on how to “promote the general welfare” of the City; it is a City where many are only concerned with what affects them

personally, or at most their block or their neighborhood. Some find their little corner of the world acceptable while the City as a whole flounders.

There is no better measure of the condition of a city than its population growth. After thousands of people individually weigh all the pros and cons that a city has to offer, the direction of population growth shows whether more or fewer people choose to live there. Even with the stunning loss of population in this City, while the County and the State were growing by leaps and bounds, there are some who still believe things are just fine.

Well they are, if slow decay and decline are comfortable, and a change to growth and prosperity is threatening. Of course, many who fall into this category enjoy their own personal prosperity that is some how insulated from the performance of the local economy, so general decay and decline doesn't seem to dramatically effect them.

Adherents to 12-step programs believe that there is no hope of recovery until you admit that you have a problem, and many cannot admit that they have a problem until they hit bottom. It is quite clear from the events of the past few days that many in the City have not yet hit bottom, so they are not ready to admit that the City has a problem; a very serious problem; more and more people don't want to live here.

For this reason, you should be commended for showing the leadership to admit that the City has a serious problem; a problem from which it may never recover without dramatic action. But, do you understand the actual cause of the problem? It's too soon to tell. The citizens don't know how you are going to vote, and they don't know the outcome of the actions that you choose to take.

Many people disagree with your actions from time to time, and I count myself among them. However, the people voted to have you represent them, but they often forget that they did NOT vote for anyone working at City Hall to run the City. Some people

say that the City has serious problems, because the law does not give their elected representatives enough control over the appointees running the GHA, the Park Board and the Wharves Board, because those appointees NEVER have to answer to the voters; but neither does the City Manager!

You would think that the people of this City would want you to exercise more control over the City Manager, as the Charter directs you to do, but recent events seem to say many would like little or no oversight on his performance, because they believe that a misguided Council is behind all of the City's problems. This seems to be why many are so upset that you are taking your responsibility seriously in the face of dire circumstances; a 50-year decline in population and a failed recovery from Hurricane Carla.

Many say that the City Manager bears no responsibility for the loss of population during his entire tenure. When asked who is responsible, some say GISD or GHA, because the primary reasons that people don't want to live in this city are the poor schools and its self-destructive eagerness to host all the Public Housing in the County. They argue that if the City Council does not give the City Manager the specific goal to increase the population it is not his responsibility.

OK, but what responsibilities are automatically part of the City Manager's job and which ones require direction from Council? This seems to be another fatal flaw in this form of government; there are no absolute answers concerning responsibilities!

What are your choices? You can take what many consider to be an unacceptable risk and fire the City Manager. The new City Manager will begin with fresh eyes and a clear mandate to reverse the City's decline, because anything less will be unacceptable. However, nothing is certain, and a new City Manager could make things worse.

Therefore, after further consideration, it might be better to let the current City Manager continue with a clearly defined goal to

increase the population over the next ten years. Of course, if you make this choice, will any Council ever have the political will or support to fire the City manager if he is unable to turn things around in the future? So in effect, will this choice create a City Manager who can never be removed?

No matter which path you take, this crisis highlights the fatal flaw in this form of government that will linger long after today, if major reforms are not implemented. The City must begin the transition to a Strong-Mayor form of government, so that the chief executive who runs the City is elected, not appointed, and to allow the Mayor and Councilmembers to be paid for doing full-time jobs, in order to make these positions available to a wider range of candidates.

Without the consensus to do this, the City's continuing, and perhaps fatal decline, is almost guaranteed!

Just observing the reactions to your move to merely put this item on the agenda for debate says that the people of this city are ultimately to blame for sitting back and allowing this situation to deteriorate for 50 years. It has fragmented the populace to the point where we cannot have a rational discussion on what needs to be done to reverse the decline of the City, because personal fiefdoms are now much more important than the general welfare. This is not the kind of climate in which wise decisions can be made!

If the old adage that the voters get what they deserve holds true in this case; the outlook is very bleak.

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