

AGENDA MATERIAL

DATE 9-20-22 ITEM NO. RA 13

Amy Santos

From: JoAnn diFilippo [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, September 16, 2022 3:57 PM
To: COB_mail
Cc: District1; DIST2; District3; District4; District5; Jan Leshner
Subject: BOS Meeting 9/20/22: Agenda Item 13 - Regional Prosperity

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Clerk of the Board: please submit this communication as a comment letter to Agenda Item 13: Regional Prosperity Task Force to Address Poverty, Improve Opportunity, and Create Community Wealth

On June 7, 2022, the board heard a proposal from Pima County employee Bonnie Bazurta on the issue of poverty in the City and County and the impact of the pandemic. If I recall correctly, Ms. Bazurta headed a similar county program commencing in 2013 referred to as "bridges out of poverty." Nevertheless, Ms. Bazurta's June 7, 2022, presentation was made to the supervisors on the same day the Small Business Commission gave their proposal requesting funding to have an independent 3rd party analysis of COVID impact on small businesses. The board denied providing any funding to the Small Business Commission. In fact, during the discussion, Supervisor Grijalva piped up and stated, "when was the last time this commission was evaluated?" Subsequently, Grijalva's comments placed a chilling effect on many to ask, "Did she really say that?"

Now, without any review and/or report from the county regarding the outcomes/performance reports of prior "ending poverty" focused programs, the supervisors are being asked to approve a joint program with the city and provide funding not to exceed \$50,000 to be co-funded with the City of Tucson. Yet, as of this date and to the best of my knowledge, nothing has been provided/approved by the supervisors to the Small Business Commission to study the impact of the COVID-19 on small businesses within the county. Perhaps the Small Business Commission should establish a similar Regional Task Force focused on small business in the county and the impact of COVID-19 on these businesses, as well as ask the county for funding to support this initiative.

One interesting aspect of the subject proposal is to increase affordable housing opportunities. Here's one recommendation from the task force and reiterated in Jan's September 20, 2022 memo:

Integrate affordable and multifamily housing options within middle to higher income neighborhoods and areas planned for future growth. Strategic element: Research shows that the neighborhood you grow up in has a significant impact on your future wealth and well-being, and Pima County has lower rates of upward mobility compared to other regions across the nation. Deconcentrating poverty, reducing segregation, and increasing social connectedness, improves opportunity and provides lasting family and community benefit. Tactical element: Provides housing to those unable to afford
(emphasis added).

Following review of this proposal, I submit the following discussion/questions to the supervisors and hope you will discuss your thoughts/answers at the September 20, 2022 board meeting:

Discussion/Question 1: Will all five supervisors agree to situate low and affordable housing opportunities in select and higher income neighborhoods within their respective Districts? Does that mean that Rex Scott is willing to situate these housing opportunities in high income/high tax bracket neighborhoods in his district such as and including but not limited

to Finnestera, Canyon del Oro, La Paloma, El Conquistador, and other country club estates? If not, this is just another example of the county preaching problem-solving solutions that are designed to appear “fair” and “equitable” on paper, but are masked in bias, discrimination, and highly subject to falling into the trap of NIMBY principles—not in my backyard!

Understandably, I believe people move to certain areas/neighborhoods for specific reasons (e.g., educational opportunities, gated communities for protection, neighborhood associations and associated “presumed” benefits, rural living lifestyles, among other) and they pay for these services and benefits in the form of property values which generate revenue for the county’s \$1.9 billion dollar budget. The more protected and exclusive, generally, the higher tax rates for the area. Meaning, you pay for what you get. And, this equates to what Jan described in her memo reiterating that “research shows that the neighborhood you grow up in has a significant impact on your future wealth and well-being, and Pima County has lower rates of upward mobility compared to other regions across the nation.” Thus, it will be enlightening to see higher income neighborhoods throughout the county integrate affordable and multifamily housing within their respective boundaries.

But we must ask ourselves, isn’t this a great example of proposed county policies that look good on paper but are masked in disingenuous efforts that will probably only apply to certain sectors of the county? If approved, could this be recognized as hypocritic grandstanding—something we see occurring on the national level?

Question 2: Is COVID funding planned on being used to support any aspect of this project? If so, what program(s) will be adjusted to accommodate this funding request. Note: there is no agenda item cover sheet attached to this memo, therefore, it is impossible to determine the funding source for any portion of the \$50,000 request. And, if approved, will the funding responsibility be 50/50 between city and county? Will other districts be asked to contribute to the \$50,000 proposed budget—while having representation on the task force?

Discussion/Question 3: As defined in Jan’s memo, the proposed composition of the task force only allows for the Board Chair, a Democrat, and County Administration, to appoint representatives. This approach denies each supervisor the ability to select their district representative(s) to the task force. As such, this appointing method denies Supervisor Christy the right to have his district represented on the task force. Being Chair Bronson’s political affiliation is that of a democrat, it is greater than not the interests of Supervisors Grijalva, Scott, and Heinz will be covered by the appointments reserved for Chair Bronson and County Administration. Do you feel this is a fair process for all taxpayers to be represented? I am speaking directly about the appointments to be made by the county and not the city or any other districts/towns/cities.

Discussion/Question 4: Prior to approving this request have any of you asked for and reviewed reports from the prior “bridges to ending poverty” and associated programs operating in the county for at least the past 8 years? Wouldn’t you want to do know the outcome(s) of these programs before making any decisions to allocate more funding? If you’ve received copies of past reports, could you please share this information with the public?

In summary, as a former consultant and Executive Director to housing authorities, these types of programs can be extremely beneficial to a community if they are implemented with careful and thorough planning, policies, and procedures. However, the key is to strategically situate policies (and associated language) that hold merit and value and can be substantiated for face value—not “pie in the sky” generic rhetoric that can backfire the best of efforts and thereby cause the county to be held liable for erroneous and misleading policy statements. Think redlining.

Thank you.

JoAnn di Filippo, PhD