



February 3rd, 2015

To Members of the Mayor's Task Force,

Texas Organizing Project (TOP) is a statewide membership organization with over 65,000 members and supporters across the state. We work to improve the lives of hardworking Texas families through community organizing, and civic and electoral engagement. TOP leaders organize around and fight for issues like expanding access to quality healthcare for all Texans, for immigration reform that will keep families together, increased spending for public schools, and neighborhood issues to help make our communities a safer place.

In San Antonio, TOP leaders have organized to improve their neighborhoods. Neighborhood safety and infrastructure are major issues in low income communities in San Antonio. Over the last six months, members have been meeting to determine the major issues they want to see addressed in their neighborhoods. The following is a list of these major issues:

Our Issues

- Lights
- Sidewalks
- Roads
- Drainage
- Home Rehabilitation

While these residential issues are very important to us, we also know that we have the right to participate in the process. We want a say in how these projects are done because we know that development projects are not always meant to help residents directly. In fact, they sometimes affect resident's ability to even stay in their neighborhood. We want to continue to live in our homes for a long time and we want to preserve the places that are important to our family and neighborhood history. We want to rehabilitate homes and buildings, not replace them. We don't want to see everything replaced in the neighborhood only to be then be replaced ourselves. Here is a list of the rights we are asserting:

Our Rights

- To participate fully in the political process
- To stay in our neighborhood long term
- To preserve our historic places
- To rehabilitate homes and buildings, not replace them

TOP staff and leaders have attended numerous meetings of the Mayor's Task Force on Preserving Dynamic and Diverse Neighborhoods. Recently, we reviewed the Task Force's Draft Report from January 29th, 2015. We thank the Task Force for their hard work in making recommendations that can help residents of low income neighborhoods. However, there are several items that require further conversation with the community. As members of this community and as your constituents, we are providing the following as feedback to this Task Force:

Community Input

In Mayor Castro's original letter, he asked this Task Force to "seek citizen input from the community". While meetings are open to the public, there is no scheduled time for community input. We are making the recommendation that this Task Force have public meetings about their recommendations in low income neighborhoods on the Westside (District 5), Southside (Districts 3 and 4), and Eastside (District 2). TOP leaders can offer our assistance in promoting these public forums. We do not believe the current proposal for a housing summit will adequately represent "citizen input from the community".

We also ask that the dates for the remainder of the Task Force Meetings be published on the city's website at least 2 weeks in advance. Any dates for future commission meetings should be published at least two weeks in advance to ensure that the public can attend these meetings.

Commission to Track Implementation

We are asking for a seat at the table on this commission. The work of the commission has the potential of greatly benefitting or greatly harming our community. As a group of people who are directly impacted by these issues, we strongly believe that we deserve a seat at the table.

Displacement

We are disappointed by the way displacement is being treated by this Task Force. It is not simply the job of the city to "monitor" displacement or to provide incentives for people to move. On the Westside alone, our leaders and their families represent over a thousand years of history in their neighborhood. Our leaders have no intention of moving from their homes. The Task Force has a responsibility to protect our rights to stay in this neighborhood. We strongly recommend that the Task Force recommend a policy that protects the rights of people who want to stay in their homes. In addition, the Task Force and the city council should take on a role to protect culturally and historically important places in our community.

Home Repair and Home Rehabilitation

We strongly believe that any local or federal money should be spent to repair and rehabilitate homes in our community for residents. Too often, the focus is on new development. There are plenty of homes in our community. We need help to repair and rehabilitate them. It makes little sense to provide incentives and resources to developers and to not provide sufficient resources to residents for their homes.

Development Incentives

As mentioned previously, we believe that resources should be spent to help rehabilitate and repair homes for residents. Money should also be allocated for street lights, roads, sidewalks, and drainage for residents, not just new developments. However, when incentives are given to developers, certain things should be **required** of the developers. It should not be optional or voluntary. It is perfectly legal for the city to require certain things when incentives are being provided. Developers that are given incentives to build should be **required** to build affordable housing units regardless of geography. They should also be required to provide the following when receiving any type of incentive:

Jobs

Developers should be required to provide jobs and training opportunities to local neighborhood residents.

Neighborhood Benefits

Any incentives given to developers should directly improve residential infrastructure for existing residents.

Environment

Developments that receive public benefits should follow responsible environmental standards and improve existing environmental conditions

Small Business

New development should focus on and benefit small locally owned businesses.

Rent Control

As the city of San Antonio grows, we need to ensure that rents are affordable for current residents. Rent concessions are legal in the state of Texas and we challenge this Task Force and the city council to develop ways to ensure that residents are not pushed out of their homes by rising rents.



Thank you very much for reviewing our recommendations. We request that a representative of Task Force follow up with Bexar County Director, Mu Son Chi. He can be reached a 210-417-8798 or mchi@organizetexas.org.

Thank you,

Texas Organizing Project Leaders