

Sent via email



**CITY OF
TUCSON**

OFFICE OF THE
CITY MANAGER

January 2, 2015

C. H. Huckelberry
County Administrator
Pima County
130 W. Congress, 10th Floor
Tucson, AZ 85701-1317

RE: January 9th Bond Advisory Committee Meeting

Dear Mr. Huckelberry:

This letter is written to address points you raised in your memorandum to the Pima County Bond Advisory Committee dated December 30, 2014. I am responding to your comments on the following projects: Pedestrian Safety and Walkability Improvements, Performing Arts Center and South 12th Avenue Cultural and Culinary Corridor.

Pedestrian Safety and Walkability Improvements

Your previous requests for additional information on the Pedestrian Safety and Walkability Improvements project have been addressed. The City's Bond Project Advisory Committee (BPAC) has stated its full support for the Pedestrian Safety and Walkability Improvements bond project and its inclusion in the Pima County Bond package. The Committee's most recent letter dated December 22, 2014 will be discussed at the Mayor and Council meeting on January 6, 2015. Mayor and Council and my office have consistently supported inclusion of this project in the bond program. As you and I have discussed several times, pedestrian safety is a critical health, safety and quality of life issue for the region.

Performing Arts Center

BPAC has made a recommendation to Mayor and Council to increase the request for the Performing Arts Center project to \$1.5 million based on a more recent estimate of the cost to bring this building to a pre-tenant improvement shell condition. This project will be discussed at the Mayor and Council meeting on January 6, 2015. In addition, I would like to clarify that the 2004 Bond funds for the Performing Arts Center were not enough, nor expected to be enough, to bring the facility up to standards for public use. Further, the City is in compliance with both the Intergovernmental Agreement and the Historic Preservation Easement. The vandalism that occurred in 2008 involved theft of wiring that would have been replaced anyway. Since that time, the exterior facades have been maintained; the facility is secure and an alarm system is in place; and there has been no further damage or vandalism. As you and I have discussed, if this project is approved by the voters, the City

will pursue a contract for private management of the venue to ensure that the facility is operated for the intended purpose.

South 12th Avenue Cultural and Culinary Corridor

Enclosed is a revised Project Sheet for the City of Tucson's bond project submittal for the South 12th Avenue Cultural and Culinary Corridor for inclusion in the agenda materials for the Pima County Bond Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting on January 9, 2015.

Since the BAC tentatively approved funding for the project in May 2014, City staff has taken several steps to respond to BAC members' comments and questions and to improve the feasibility of the project. The following changes have occurred since that time:

- The Tohono O'odham Nation awarded the City \$71,000 in grant funds to add bus shelters and pads, landscape improvements and signage in the project area.
- The City of Tucson has allocated \$35,000 in Litter Fee funds toward landscape improvements in the project area.
- The City of Tucson has committed to funding (approximately \$100,000 in staff time) a thorough Corridor Planning process with business and property owners, neighborhood residents, and other regional stakeholders to create a detailed plan of improvements. The City has used this process to successfully plan for improvements in existing commercial areas with constrained rights-of-way such as North Campbell Avenue, North Stone Avenue, and North Grande Avenue.
- The City conducted two meetings with 12th Avenue property and business owners and neighbors to discuss the project. 30 people attended the meetings, and voiced strong support for public infrastructure improvements. Some property owners are open to exploring reconfiguration of parking and we feel confident that we will be able to create an accessible route that traverses the corridor. Further detail about these comments is given in the Project Sheet.

Similar to the County's proposed Sonoran Corridor bond item, the project does involve a transportation corridor. However, the City considers the primary purpose of this project to be for economic development, and thus a strong candidate for bond funding.

Sincerely,



Martha Durkin
Interim City Manager

Enclosure: South 12th Avenue Cultural & Culinary Corridor Project Sheet

MD/JBM

C: Honorable Mayor and Council Members, City of Tucson
Mike Rankin, City Attorney
Kelly Gottschalk, Assistant City Manager and Chief Financial Officer
Albert Elias, Assistant City Manager
Daryl Cole, Director, Department of Transportation
Nicole Ewing Gavin, Program Director, Office of Integrated Planning
Lynne Birkinbine, Administrator, Office of Integrated Planning

Project Name: South 12th Avenue Cultural & Culinary Corridor

Location: Project area is within a two mile corridor on South 12th Avenue, from Ajo to Drexel

Scope: This is an economic development project to invest in signage, landscape, and pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements along one of Pima County's most culturally unique and vibrant, but underserved commercial corridors. Specifically, the project will include signage designating the commercial district along the corridor, sidewalks, pedestrian median refuge islands, landscaping, nodes of shade and seating, lighting improvements, and repaving of the roadway to add bike lanes.

Benefits: The South 12th Avenue Cultural and Culinary Corridor project will improve safety, walkability, and aesthetics in a commercial district that celebrates the region's distinctive Mexican American heritage. The improvements will spur further private investment in this commercial corridor; increase cultural and culinary tourism; and improve conditions for the tens of thousands of pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and motorists who use the corridor every day.

The project will provide long overdue public investment in a portion of South 12th Avenue that is a distinctive hub of Pima County's Latino culture and a popular regional culinary destination. The corridor is lined with shops that have traditionally been owned by and cater to generations of Mexican American and native families. South 12th Avenue is home to some of Tucson's most celebrated and successful Mexican restaurants, is a key segment of Visit Tucson's "Best 23 Miles of Mexican Food," and is the focus of regular "Best of the Barrio" food tours. It lies on the region's second most heavily used transit route; hosts Tucson's two major private bus lines providing service to Mexico; and is heavily used by automobiles, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

While Pima County's \$9 million 12th Avenue Community Revitalization Project (1997 HURF bonds) provided improvements outside of the project area, these improvements did not address the needs of the commercial core of the corridor. Most of this core area is not served by sidewalks or safe pedestrian crossings, and is devoid of shade or landscape improvements. It has been the site of 27 auto accidents involving bicyclists and pedestrians in the past four years, including three fatalities, much higher rates than those found in the City overall.

Local business leaders in the project vicinity have been seeking improvements for over two decades. In 2013 a new business association, the South Side Business Coalition (SSBC), was formed to champion investment in the corridor to support and encourage business development. The SSBC has sponsored lending and credit support classes at the Microbusiness Advancement Center and the University of Arizona, and local graffiti cleanups. The SSBC has been collaborating with City staff on grant applications and efforts to seek out support for strategic investments in infrastructure in the corridor's commercial core. Local schools and neighborhood associations have joined business leaders in advocating for improvements and participating in various planning initiatives over the years.

In September 2014, the City conducted two public meetings on the proposed project. Property owners, businesses, and representatives from neighborhoods along the project corridor were notified by postcard and by phone. The purpose of the meetings was to update the public on the proposed bond-funded 12th Avenue improvement project, to answer questions, and to receive stakeholders' comments and suggestions. A total of 31 people signed in at the two meetings, the majority of which were business and/or property owners in the project area.

Participants indicated great support for improvements on South 12th Avenue. Their comments (verbal and written) addressed the importance of making the corridor safer for pedestrians; the benefit to businesses of making the corridor more attractive; the need for better lighting to help combat crime; and the need to carefully consider the design of public art in the project given the area's graffiti problems. These comments will all help guide the ultimate design of the project.

To create a detailed plan of improvements, the City of Tucson will lead a thorough Corridor Planning process with business and property owners, neighborhood residents, and other regional stakeholders. The City has successfully conducted planning and implementation of similar projects in constrained commercial corridors including Campbell Avenue, Stone Avenue, and Grande Avenue.

Cost: \$3,584,500

Bond Funding: \$3,178,500

Other Funding: The following resources have been committed to the project:

- \$100,000 – City of Tucson – Corridor Planning process
- \$200,000 – City of Tucson (federal funds) – HAWK pedestrian crossing
- \$71,000 – City of Tucson (Tohono O’Odham 12% grant) – bus shelters and pads, landscaping and public art at north and south end of project area
- \$35,000 – City of Tucson – landscaping at north and south end of corridor

\$406,000 TOTAL

The City of Tucson and Pima County have applied for designation as a federal Promise Zone for the region, which if awarded could bring funding for additional improvements to the S. 12th Avenue corridor. In addition, the City will continue to pursue funding opportunities such as the federal Transportation Alternatives Program and historic sign preservation monies.

Fiscal Year Project Start and Finish Date: Start date 2017/2018, End date 2020/2021.

Project Management Jurisdiction: City of Tucson

Future Operating and Maintenance (O&M) Costs: The City of Tucson will maintain the improvements at an estimated annual cost of \$50,000. The City has demonstrated its commitment and capability to maintain a high level of O&M in its care of the similar improvements that Pima County completed to 12th Ave. south of Drexel.

Regional Benefits: Businesses, governments, and community leaders across Pima County increasingly trade on the region’s cultural and economic ties with Mexico as a source of tourism, visitor spending, and economic development. South 12th Avenue, which is the terminus of the region’s two major Mexican bus lines, is not only the gateway by which many Mexican visitors enter the region, but also a popular alternate route to I-19 for commuters traveling to downtown Tucson. The corridor itself, now a nationally recognized culinary destination, has served as an incubator for successful businesses that now operate branches throughout the region. With targeted investment and continued business and public engagement, the corridor has the potential to become a culturally relevant public space and tourist destination comparable to that of Olvera Street in L.A. or the Mission District in San Francisco.

Investing in the condition and character of the South 12th Avenue Cultural and Culinary Corridor will promote tourism, support the development of local and regional businesses, improve safety and connectivity on a regionally significant transportation route, and complete the investments begun by Pima County in 1997.

The project has been identified among the highest priorities by the City of Tucson’s Bond Projects Advisory Committee.

Supervisor District of Project Location: District 5