

Summer 2017 Newsletter

Conversations with Kasandra City Councilor District 1 *The Economic Heart of Las Cruces*



Once a Social Worker, Always a Social Worker

More state of mind than geographic area, District 1 is home to both great innovation and persistent inequality. I strongly believe that we cannot leverage the former without owning the latter. Since being sworn in as your representative on City Council, I have often been reminded of this old joke about my previous profession: How many social workers does it take to change a light bulb? None. The bulb is fine. It's the system that needs changing. As a social worker-turned-city councillor, I am keenly aware that the most pressing challenges that we face in District 1 are far more systematic than bureaucratic. That is to say that these issues won't get or stay fixed through good governance alone. In fact, over the past year successfully fulfilling my campaign promises (to be responsive, respectful and relationship building) has meant creating opportunities for ALL concerned stakeholders — constituents, employers across all sectors, civil and civic leaders — to collaboratively transform the very same flawed and inadequate systems that produced the problems that vex us today.

Scroll through this quarterly newsletter for a look at some of many examples of how this work is resulting in new systems that will produce better, safer and healthier ways of living in District 1. As always, thank you for engaging with me.



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Mesquite Fire Sparks New Systems

There is no question that abandoned structures, and the self-perpetuating cycle of blight they inspire, threaten the cohesion of many neighborhoods in District 1. Recently, a suspicious fire in an abandoned house in the Mesquite Historical District turned up the heat on constituents' already simmering public safety and property value concerns.

In my subsequent meetings with residents conversations about how this traumatic event had impacted individual lives, quickly turned to naming the flawed economic, social and city government systems that have contributed to the problem for years, including the role that:

- Poverty, aging, sickness, unemployment, mental illness and incarceration play in property abandonment
- Homelessness, addiction and violence play in crime in and around abandoned structures
- Poorly communicated codes and regulations and disjointed enforcement strategies play in neighborhood decline



Here are highlights of some of the systems transformations that have occurred in response to these citizens' concerns:

- More than 100 abandoned and neglected properties across the city have been catalogued and mapped. To access these files, [download](#), complete and submit a Public Records Request to the Contact the City Clerk's Office. Questions? Call (575) 541-2117, or email the City Clerk for help.
- High-level representatives of the Chief Operations Office, Community Development, Codes Enforcement, Council and Constituent Services, Facilities, Fire Department, Land Management, Legal, Police Department, and the Public Information Office (known as the Neighborhood are in the process of making recommendations to the City Manager on the issues of neglected and abandoned properties.

To report a vacant or abandoned building, or suspicious activity at a vacant or abandoned building, contact the general Codes Office at 528-4100.

Mea Culpa

In our last newsletter, we included an incorrect number for Suicide Prevention Services. The correct number for Mesilla Valley Hospital is 575-382-3500.

Building on What Works

In Las Cruces, the demographics and dispositions of our diverse population drive demand for access to culturally-appropriate community and health services. With deep roots in the communities they serve, local nonprofit service providers not only enable the City to meet this demand, but to also better understand what is fueling it. These organizations include Keep Las Cruces Beautiful, Families and Youth Inc., Community Foundation, Weed and Seed Program, PAL Boxing, and Boys and Girls Club just to name just a few. The impact of factors such as poverty, institutionalized racism, housing stability and food insecurity, (collectively known as social determinants of health) are profound. Understanding these threats and how to overcome them is key to making sound investments for the future of all Las Cruceans.

Historically, Las Cruces has turned to operational strategies such as adding more doctors and hospitals to our healthcare infrastructure for solutions. But my keenly developed social worker Spidey sense tells me that we cannot build or recruit our way to health equity. Building on what is already working for us, however, is a great place to start. That's why I have been meeting with local nonprofit community and health services providers to explore ways that the City can better support and leverage their hands-on, one-on-one approach to care. Here are some highlights of what I have learned:

Many nonprofit service providers in Las Cruces:

- Emerged as grassroots responses to the pressures that social determinants of health had on the communities they serve. They are natural allies and strong advocates for change.
- Report that recent spending cuts (federal as well as local) are forcing them to make difficult decisions about how, when and to whom they deliver services and have put their long-term viability in jeopardy.
- Are caught in the cross-hairs of the competing interests and visions of disparate City departments and would benefit from a higher level of coordination among them.
- Need and would welcome capacity building and mentorship from the City, particularly in the areas of leadership, governance and finance.

In District 1 the value of the services that nonprofits deliver cannot be overstated. Ensuring the strength and sustainability of these vital community partners is in the best interest of our communities, and so must also be in the City's realm of responsibility. I am deeply committed to working with other City innovators to look beyond individual program funding by supporting organizational capacity development for nonprofits serving populations most at risk.

Recently, the City of Las Cruces and Dona Ana County jointly convened the Live Well Summit, a two-day discussion of many of these same topics. Click here to download a copy of the Live Well Summit [background materials and final report](#).

“A Goal without a Plan is Just a Wish”

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

[Plan4LasCruces](#) is a City Council approved policy document that provides a vision of what the city should be. It is a guide for municipal decision-makers for capital improvements, and a tool for managing community changes that may affect the physical development and maintenance in the city. Additionally, Plan4LasCruces:

- Helps elected officials, appointed officials, and staff to make decisions based on furthering the community vision.
- Gives existing residents and people relocating to Las Cruces a look into the community as it exists now and what it plans to become.
- Provides reassurance to people looking to invest in our community
- Highlights Las Cruces to both business and recreational travelers.

Designed to be a living document that reflects the vision of our community over time, Plan4LasCruces incorporates a unique phased timeline and themed development process:

Phase 1 (adopted in 2013) provided an administrative update to the 1999 Comprehensive Plan. In addition to removing obsolete policies and completed actions, as well as divided the plan into four distinct themes:

- [Healthy Communities](#)
- [Community Character](#)
- [Economic Prosperity](#)
- [Sustainable Growth](#)

Phase 2, which focuses on Healthy Communities, is currently underway. Throughout 2016, the City hosted a series of Presentations and a Workshop on the theme, including:

- [Designing Healthy Communities](#)
- [Planning for Intergenerational Communities](#)
- [Kid-Friendly Cities](#)

Your feedback, questions and ideas are still needed. Please send comments to planning@las-cruces.org.

Greetings from the Alameda Depot Neighborhood

The annual Mother's Day brunch will be held May 14th, 10:00, @ Pioneer Park; weather permitting. Bring a dish and photo of your mom to share.



(Alameda Depot Neighborhood cont'd)

Congratulations to these recently elected officers:

- *President - Robert Cruise*
- *Vice President - Wayne Huber*
- *Secretary - Connie Chapman*
- *Treasurer - Lamaia Vaughn*

J. Paul Taylor School is working with Alma d'arte to install a track around the dirt area on the NE side. They have already raised \$30,000 of the estimated \$110,000 needed to finish including additional play structures. They anticipate future fund raisers and will ask the Alameda Depot association for support through fundraisers and direct donations.

**Orange Barrels Have You Seeing Red?**

Change is stressful. Especially when that change involves roads that take you where you want to go and need to be. Relax, here are some resources to help you get around District 1's changing landscape:

Juniper Avenue Closure:

- For project information, [visit](#).
- Or call Project Manager, Lorenzo Hernandez, 575-528-3072.

Solano Drive-Three Crosses Avenue-N. Main Street Intersection Project

- For project information contact NMDOT Project Manager, Ryan Tafoya, at 575-525-7313, ryan.tafoya@state.nm.us

Church-Water Two Way Conversion:

- Follow the project on Facebook with the [City of Las Cruces](#) and [Downtown Las Cruces Partnership](#) or on Twitter [@MSTDLasCruces](#).
- Or contact Downtown Coordinator, Andy Hume, 575.528.3048, ahume@las-cruces.org; City Project Manager, Jimmy Moreno, 575.528.3126, jmoreno@las-cruces.org

General traffic concerns:

- City of Las Cruces Traffic Alerts
- Traffic Enforcement Requests – online form - <http://www.las-cruces.org/> and go to Police Department page
- Street and Traffic Operations Office for the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program 575.541.2505

Helpful Community Resources

United Way 2-1-1 (Dial Toll Free 2-1-1)

—Provides referrals to available human services for teachers, individuals, children and families. better connecting our community and increasing self-sufficiency.

Be Cool Fan Donations — The City of Las Cruces helps to distribute donated fans to the elderly and families. For more information, contact

<http://WWW.Facebook.com/DonaAnaCountyInformation>.

Landlord/Tenant Handbook — The City of Las Cruces' free comprehensive *Landlord/Tenant Relations Handbook* is a useful guide for both renters and landlords Click here to access The Landlord/Tenant Relations Handbook in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). For more information, call Housing & Family Services at 575-528-3022 or fairhousing@las-cruces.org.



(Photo: Jaime Guzman/For the Sun-News)

Cool Fun for Hot Months

Free and fun for All

The City of Las Cruces Parks & Recreation Department will present the 2017 Movies in the Park Program two Saturdays per month from May through September. All screenings listed below begin at dusk at Young Park, 1905 E. Nevada Ave — except for “The Jungle Book 2016,” which will be shown at the Plaza de Las Cruces on May 27. *

May

- 13 Moana
- 27 The Jungle Book 2016 (Plaza de Las Cruces)

June

- 10 The Secret Life of Pets
- 24 Pete’s Dragon

July

- 15 Rogue One, A Star Wars Story
- 29 Alice Through the Looking Glass

August

- 12 Sing
- 26 The Lego Batman Movie

September

- 9 The BFG
- 23 Finding Dory

Schedule and location subject to change without notice. For more information, contact the Parks & Recreation Department at 575/541-2550.

Cool Fun cont'd

Especially for Kids

City of Las Cruces Youth Sports and Programming - The City of Las Cruces sponsors and co-sponsors a wide variety of age appropriate sports programs, most at a cost of under \$50 per child. Registration begins soon! Check out the City's [web page](#) for more information.

Doña Ana Arts Council (DAAC) Summer Youth Camps – DAAC's 2017 summer programs roster includes [Career Art Path](#), [Opera Camp](#), [Missoula Children's Theatre](#). Programs have differing focuses, age restrictions, dates and costs. Or call (575) 523-6403.

Going on Downtown

[First Friday Ramble](#): 1st Friday of each month, 5pm-7pm

Farmers and Crafts Evening Market, Wednesdays-5:00pm-11pm

[Blazin' BrewFest](#), May 6, 5-9 pm, Plaza De Las Cruces & Main-Las Cruces-Griggs, tickets \$17, \$6

[Zoot Suit Pachanga](#) , June 2nd & 3rd, Klein Park. 6:00 pm, free

[Rio Grande Theater](#) (operated by Doña Ana Arts Council), show times and ticket prices vary, see calendar of [upcoming events](#).

[Thomas Branigan Memorial](#) Library offers a wide range of free events and classes.

City of Las Cruces Museums including: [Branigan Cultural Center](#), the [Las Cruces Museum of Art](#), the [Las Cruces](#)

[Museum of Nature & Science](#) and the [Las Cruces Railroad Museum](#). Each of these lively museums will be open late every Wednesday throughout the summer!

Nearby and Notable

[Cinco de Mayo Fiesta](#), May 6 – 7, starts at noon ends 10PM Sat/7PM Sunday. Free admission, (575) 524-3262.

[Las Cruces Wine Festival](#), (formerly Southern New Mexico Wine Festival), May 27 – 29, 2017, Southern New Mexico Fairgrounds, \$35-\$5

[Red, White and Brew](#) – Wine & Beer Festival, June 30 – July 2, 2017, Las Cruces Convention Center, Friday 5 – 10 pm, Saturday and Sunday Noon – 6, \$15 in advance, \$20, – (575) 522-1232.