

December 8, 2013

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you and your loved ones had an enjoyable and meaningful Thanksgiving. This week's ward letter discusses tax revaluation, City Council contingency funds and the United Providence school management organization.

Last Tuesday, the Revaluation Commission developed a set of tentative recommendations for future real property tax revaluations. The Commission recommends the passage of State legislation to provide communities an option to "phase in" tax revaluations over three years. Communities electing this option would set new property values every three years, but only one third of the change would be added each year. This would allow households facing dramatic tax increases time to adjust to the change. The Commission also recommended changes in the Assessor's internal designed to increase public outreach, online access to the revaluation database and time to meet with the revaluation company to discuss one's particular property. The commission will now prepare a report describing its work for consideration by the City Council.

A few weeks ago, a news report revealed that the City Council managed and disbursed two contingency funds, one controlled by the Finance Committee Chair and one by the City Council President. The Finance Committee fund was managed at the personal whim of the Finance Committee Chair, who communicated its existence to some colleagues, but not others. The account directed thousands of dollars, often on a repeat basis, to a small number of charitable organizations located within the City Council ward of the Finance Chair and/or his favored colleagues. The City Council President's fund made grants largely in response to those organizations who knew about fund, but the City Council did not publicize its existence. I was unaware of either fund until I read the media report. I expressed my concerns to the City Council leadership, and those funds are now being consolidated and frozen pending the development of a more transparent grants process. I have proposed guidelines designed to open the applications and awards, giving a preference to new organizations that have not received grants in the past or funding from other City sources. The City Council leadership indicated it will publish the new guidelines soon, at which time I am hopeful the City Council will open up this process to a broader base to deserving organizations from all of the City's neighborhoods, including but not limited to those neighborhoods that have heretofore been excluded from the process, such as ours.

This **Thursday night (December 12, 2013) at 6:45 p.m.**, the Education Committee will hear a report from the School Department on the United Providence (UP) school management organization. UP was established as a teacher-management collaborative to assume the administration of three schools designated by the Department of Education for intervention due to poor performance, including the Alvarez High School . UP's mission is to increase teacher involvement in school management decisions, based on the premise that collaboration of this kind will provide benefits for students. In recent weeks, the State Department of Education has contacted UP to review its performance, and the Education Committee will provide a forum for the public to learn more about that review.

Sincerely,

