

To : Merced City Council

January 19, 2021

From : Michael Belluomini

Ref: Town Hall Design Item K.1

The council began town hall meetings approximately ten years ago. They have evolved into an effective way to hear the concerns of citizens. They are the first step of the planning process of listen, plan , act.

The issue with public participation is the frame of mind at city hall into which it is heard. My experience as a council member was that ideas advocated by citizens at town hall meetings were received with a welcome attitude by council then a month or two later were dismissed at budget meetings. They were dismissed because they need more funding, or manpower, or change than the normal operation of daily activities of city government would allow. Examples are 1) constructing a sidewalk from Weaver School to Golden Valley High School for a safe route to schools. and 2) increased funding for park maintenance/improvement and program activities dismissed repeatedly as unaffordable.

If the city council is sincere in wanting to make change to improve Merced in response to citizen comments at town hall meetings then it cannot take the approach that all city operations, staff, functions, and financial reserves that existed in the previous year should be continued and whatever city funding or staff time is "left over" can be dedicated to improvements requested by citizens. Budgets reflect priorities and should reflect citizen requests. If daily operations and staffing and fiscal prudence use all available city resources then what is the point of asking citizens to come to town hall meetings to ask for improvement ?

If you are sincere about responding to citizen requests for improvement then accept the probability that changes to existing department operations, staffing, or financial conservatism are required.