



## ***News from the Helotes Heritage Association***

Dear Readers,

Governance of small municipalities is overseen by elected officials who serve because of a sense of public duty. These are typically not professional or career politicians. It is inspirational when one steps forward and clarifies a disputed governance issue as clearly and eloquently as J.B. Richeson did at the last Helotes City Council meeting.

One of the items placed on the City Council meeting agenda by Council members J.B. Richeson and Alina Matutes-Eckhardt was a resolution directing City employees to not honor or pay any invoice or charges for goods or services without Council approval. The Mayor had taken that to include pay checks, office supplies, training, building maintenance, etc. At the meeting Council member Richeson explained the intent of the resolution:

“I have no interest in making City government run more slowly or making life more difficult for the City employees. My interest is in transparent and open government and having the decisions that are made about the expenditure of the City’s funds be done in an open forum with citizens having a right to have input and to have discussion and have knowledge about what actions are taken.

“My vision of this only referred to what I consider to be non-routine expenditures of City operation. Such things as salary, for example, were not envisioned by me to be included in this resolution because when the budget was approved there was a separate table in the spreadsheet that showed the salaries for all of the individuals and how much they were to be paid, and I see nothing to be gained by re-approving what I consider to have already been approved. It would be a waste of time, and it would hamstring the operation of the City. Nor did I envision the approval of City Council for supplies and minor expenditures. That was never envisioned when this was submitted.

“I would like for the City Attorney to draft a proposed ordinance which would specify how funds are spent and would clearly delineate authority and responsibility in the City. It would feature such things as a discussion of non-routine expenditures and how that approval process is arrived at, ensuring that those non-routine expenditures would be done in a public forum with input from the entire City Council.

“I have no belief that what was done was not done in anything but good faith. That’s not the allegation I’m making. However, it was also not done with public input. It was just simply done. The projects, I think, were laudable. As far as I know they were good projects, and I’m not trying to say they were bad or they shouldn’t have been done, but I am saying that such questions as how were the priorities made, which projects were done and which were not done, were any of the projects on private property so City expenditure of funds was made on private property, were there engineering studies to see if there was any impact of this either upstream or downstream, and if there is an unintended impact of our work, were questions of our liability addressed. All of these are questions that different people have asked me, and because I have little information, I am

unable to answer the questions.

“I’ve been dealing with the public sector my whole adult life, and it has been my experience that major expenditures by the entity are done with the full participation of the decision-making body that makes those expenditures, and I think that should be clearly delineated in Helotes. I do not believe that anything was done improperly. I do not believe that money was necessarily misspent, but I think it’s important to have broad public discussion when the expenditure of public funds is made, and that’s my interest in this particular subject.

“Once the attorneys have drafted such a resolution or ordinance, whichever is appropriate, I think there should be a full City Council discussion of that ordinance before it is adopted and I would recommend that it be done in a workshop-type setting so that there can be full input from other City Council members as well as the general public if appropriate.

“Therefore, I am asking that this item be pulled and I am suggesting what I consider the corresponding item, number 26, be pulled as well.”

I want to “go with a understanding that the attorneys are going to work on our procedural piece, which I think is a real problem, and that in the interim we will continue to operate, more or less as we have previously, with the understanding, and this is a very difficult one, that expenditures that are outside of routine be brought to City Council until the procedures can be developed.”

[Appreciation to Kathy Smith for providing the above transcribed text]

Sincerely,  
Ron Green, President  
Helotes Heritage Association