

The phrase "24/7" could have easily been coined for the Police or Fire Department. Their motto "To Protect and to Serve" is not just a slogan - it is our way of life for them.

Even in off-hours, they're expected and do continue to do their job. From patrolling the streets to enforcing traffic laws, a police officer's job is one of the "most important" in every community: to keep the streets safe and protect citizens from harm.

These are professional men and women who risk their lives with every call they respond to. This is not a 9 to 5 office job where the only risk you encounter is a computer crash with none of your files backed up. When a 1<sup>st</sup> responder responds to an emergency, it could potentially be his or hers last call. It's through their professional training and experience that stepping forward to save a citizen in distress is just second nature to them.

Despite all the value the Police and Fire Department provide to the citizens of San Benito, it pains me to see them struggling with the Mayor and the City Administration for better pay and the needed/required personnel and equipment to better protect the city.

Until recently, the Police Department's request for many years for new police vehicles was met with the same mantra from the City Administration and City Commission: "We don't have the money!".

What narks or aggravates me when I hear that mantra is that while the City claims to not have the money to support the Police and Fire department, they recently spent between \$12,000 and \$15,000 for a multiple night block party to celebrate the City's anniversary celebration. This celebration or expenditure could have easily been delayed until the City could afford the expenditure.

"We don't have the money....but" .....

.....the City conveniently had the money to pay the expenses for Mayor Joe Hernandez, Mayor Pro Tem Antonio Hernandez, City Manager Manuel Lara, an Assistant City Manager, the City Secretary, and the CDBG Coordinator to attend a

four day TML Conference in Houston, Texas.

.....the City decided to not collect the over \$5,000 in rental fees owed by the San Benito Stock Show from prior years and then decides to make it a “city sponsored event” to forgo/bypass collecting the additional rental fees.

.....the City decided to forgo collecting over \$5,000 in property taxes due to the city by people who failed to perform their due diligence and purchased property with tax liens attached.

.....the City doled out \$56,536 in Chapter 380 Grant Money, \$21,536 over the budgeted \$35,000.

And finally, the City does not have the money, but they create an “additional” Assistant City Manager position with the assertion that the citizens will be better served. Any reorganization , private or public, is done with documented performance measures or metrics to measure the extent to which they meet organizational goals. How exactly is the City Administration going to be held accountable?

One of the critical factors a corporation measures in determining a new business site is the level of public safety. I honestly don’t think the City of San Benito has reached the level where major corporations/retailers are willing to locate a business in our city. Just “saying” the Police and Fire Department is well equipped and staffed to meet the city’s needs just doesn’t make it true.

The time has arrived for the San Benito City Commission and the City Administration to step up and really support our First Responders by providing them with better pay and the equipment and staff necessary to “Protect and Serve” the community.

Don’t just say how much you support the SBPD and SBFD, show it!

If the City Commission and Administration is not willing to “truly” support the City of San Benito Police and Fire Department it will be time to set “Plan B” in motion!

Jose F. Rodriguez

