

October 15, 2019

San José Downtown Association
28 N 1st St #1000
San José, CA 95113

SJDA Board President Michael Rewkiewicz and Executive Director Scott Knies,

I am truly disappointed. I have worked very well with the San José Downtown Association, the Board, and Executive Director Scott Knies for many years now, and though we may not always agree politically, this is the first time I have been personally offended. The Executive Director of SJDA has the ability to influence a great number of our downtown business and property owners, and this past Friday that opportunity was taken advantage to unfortunately share a false and offensive narrative.

I have now heard from several different sources how disappointed they were in the presentation and felt Scott's words were racially insensitive. Additionally, they felt the need to personally apologize for some of the comments made.

Although I was not present at the meeting, I assume Scott was very aware his words would spark controversy and therefore he shared them with my office prior to our scheduled meeting. After reading them, I concur with the sentiment of others, Scott's words were not only insensitive but they were offensive to me and my Council colleagues. Adding insult to injury, the message was also false and misleading.

Scott was personally on sabbatical and not present at the controversial votes referenced. Upon return, Scott and I met and he asked me about those contentious votes, but surprisingly he chose not to share the context I provided. I explained the history behind them and how neither were attempting to divide the Council along racial lines (Vice Mayor Chappie Jones and Councilmember Lan Diep stand as examples), but rather they were rooted in the socioeconomic inequities and historical racism that undeniably played a part in shaping San José's history. I personally pulled together and led the effort around the equity budget discussions and although our Mayor did not adopt our position, he has not denied the historical inequities and has made several efforts to address them since that meeting. I don't know if Scott ran his statement by the Board, but although it appears he may not believe that historical racism is still shaping our future or that race and equity are issues worth addressing, I would at least hope the Board of Directors would be willing to speak out against that position. I personally know that several SJDA Board Members, much like several members in the audience that day, and just like our City Council, recognize that these are real issues.

Additionally, Scott mentioned that our Planning Commission appointments have become highly politicized and compared them, and the two other contentious votes, to the toxicity of national politics. First off, any appointment to a local commission is political, that's the business we're in,

and secondly he neglected to mention to your members that our Planning Commission is the only remaining commission without equal representation across the city. Prior to our last appointments we had four people from District 6 and one from District 3 and historically several districts have been underrepresented for years. Yes, our Council debated this issue, and yes five Councilmembers who share the same values and ethnic background came up on the losing side trying to change this during one appointment vote. Subsequently, our Mayor and Council colleagues agreed we did need to change this process and we are doing so now. So to bring these up as if they were issues of “tribalism” meant to “divide us” and to say that somehow this kind of progress has “never been the San José way”, demonstrates how out of touch Scott is with social progress and especially with San José’s needs.

Personally, I would like an apology on behalf of SJDA from Scott and/or the Board and I believe my colleagues deserve one as well. I would also like for your members to have an opportunity to hear the truth, and I will rely on the Board to ensure that happens as well. As elected officials we deal with politics every day and my colleagues and I debate and regularly contend one another, but I have never believed any of them to be racist nor has anyone on the Council said so much of anyone else. What was described to your members on Friday, in Scott’s own words, made our Council out to be one of divisiveness and comparable to the toxicity of our federal government, I would personally like your members to know that our Council is nothing like that and in fact we agree more often than not and outside of the office many of us get along very well.

I understand the message focused around two potential ballot measures for next year. We are all entitled to our opinion of any measure, but I was disappointed Scott didn’t share the full narrative about them either and I’d be happy to help educate any member of the Board wishing to hear another perspective. Even still, I personally would not have bothered to share this response had Scott’s message stuck to lobbying on those issues rather than drag into it a false narrative about the Council and specifically efforts I have helped lead.

I look forward to a response and I am hopeful we can build a better understanding. Additionally, I encourage the San José Downtown Association to join our Council as we continue to learn about and address equity in the City of San José at our study session in December.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raul", with a stylized, flowing script.

Raul Peralez
Councilmember, District 3
City of San José

CC: SJDA Board of Directors