The Case For Survey Based Goal Setting
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When I first got on Council I pushed for a Residential and Commercial Code Compliance survey. Basically, I asked that we create an objective scoring criterion, randomly pull a list of Tempe addresses (to create a statistically significant sampling) and go and score these homes or businesses. You don't necessarily cite them, just score them. The idea being, year over year, you know in an objective way if things are getting better or getting worse. And, more importantly, you know the best way to spend money.

For example, you might have a goal of lowering reported crime to some specific #. Logically, you would think that adding more police officers would be the most cost-effective way to lower crime. But, what if the most cost-effective way to lower crime is to increase lighting, to clean graffiti, or to improve walkability? Until you have the data of what programs affect absolute crime numbers, you'll never really know the most cost effective course of action.

Previous Tempe goals have been of the following type…. "*respond to a call about graffiti and get it cleaned up within 24 hours*" or "*have 90% of residents say on a citizen satisfaction survey they feel like they live in a safe city.*" I believe these are the wrong types of goals.

I believe residents don't notice what is, but they notice what changes. So, for example, if you live in a neighborhood with only 5% renters, and your area changes to 8% renters, you might think, "renters are EVERYWHERE in my neighborhood!" However, if you live in a neighborhood with 70% renters, and the number drops to 50%, you might think, "my neighborhood has a lot less renters".

The same would be true of crime, of graffiti, of lighting, of bike-ability... I believe you don't think and notice things in absolute terms, but in the change compared to what they previously were. Why is this relevant?

It's relevant because it helps the city understand where to put resources. We don't need to only know if things feel like they are getting better in the city, we need to know if they have reached an objective level that we find acceptable. It also means the squeaky wheel might not be the area most in need of resources, in absolute terms.

A recent issue brought this idea home for me. It is a statistic I saw regarding the number of calls Tempe gets in any given month from residents about burnt out path lighting. In a typical month we get about 8-10 calls reporting burnt out path lights (chart). We respond to, and repair, those lights very quickly. Likewise, the citizen satisfaction survey says we are doing a good job in this area. So, does that mean we are?

A randomized survey of city paths found that out of 1052 lights, about 150 were burnt out. That's about 14.2% of all path lights being burnt out. Is 14.2% of all path lights being burnt out acceptable? Is that what our goal should be?

But wait, why aren't people calling these lights in? I think, for two reasons. #1, people are busy and have better things to do with their time. But also #2, people have simply accepted the fact that having 1/10 of all the lights burnt out on a multi-use is the level of service they are accustomed to.

Only by knowing the 14.2% can we have a policy vs. cost discussion about what that number should be. Should it be 1%, 3%, 5%?

Goal setting is important, and I'm proud that Tempe has started switching its goal setting over to this type of objective, randomized survey, driven process.

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*You can see various Tempe statistics I've collected here.

*You can see Tempe's current list of goals here.