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Mayor needs to lead Tucson toward vision

Our view: Walkup outlines optimistic State of the City; road map, mechanisms for making ideas reality needed.

Always upbeat Tucson Mayor Bob Walkup painted a rosy picture Friday during his ninth annual State of the City speech.

"My honest assessment is that we are doing well," Walkup said. "But we can do better. And we must do better."

Walkup's optimistic attitude and pride in our city are always appreciated — "... we should be proud of how far we have come," he said.

However, as noted in our endorsement of Walkup before the November election: speedy progress in needed.

With a lean budget year ahead — the city will have \$5 million to \$7 million less in revenue for the fiscal year that starts July 1 — Walkup said there would be no new taxes. Internal cuts will be used to balance the books.

He also said during an interview on KUAT-TV's "Arizona Illustrated" Friday afternoon that this year would not be the best time to ask the city to fund new or expanded programs.

He encouraged the Tucson City Council to stick with the 10-year fiscal sustainability plan, now in its third year. The sustainability plan is aimed at keeping up with growth and boosting critical services, such as police and emergency services, street repair and park maintenance and improvements.

Tucson must exercise prudence in its budgeting process: Critical services must be the priority and every expenditure must be evaluated.

Tucson City Manager Mike Hein's comprehensive \$117.4 million list of the city's discretionary spending is an excellent starting point for that type of thorough examination.

Economic dips, such as the one we're in, should be used as an opportunity to plan and be ready for the inevitable economic upswing.

For that reason, we're pleased that Walkup noted several investments — a convention center hotel, the University of Arizona Science Center, a new arena and infrastructure work — are under way and will continue.

Walkup included four other policy topics that he said serve the community's economy and environment.

- The city, Pima County, towns and tribal governments need to "form a consistent, unified land use plan for our entire region."

He said the whole community would benefit from a unified plan that would identify and locate where homes, employment centers, parks and open spaces would work best. Such a plan would be an opportunity to create development guidelines, he said.

- The city needs to reform its land -use code to encourage infill — growing up and inward, not outward — and repair its dysfunctional system of approving requests to renovate homes and redevelop neighborhoods.

He praised the private sector's Tucson Downtown Partnership and its potential to galvanize Downtown revitalization into a bricks-and-mortar reality.

- Regional water planning is needed; however, he said the discussion of a regional water authority is premature.

He said the goal is simple: "safe, appealing, abundant and affordable water." And the private and public sectors would be involved in the solutions.

- Green economic development in environmental technologies such as biofuels, solar and wind power will create, and — note the phrase because it's bound to become a buzz word— "green-collar jobs."

Walkup cited the area's economic development group, Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities, Inc., for its recommendations to focus on environmental technology industry for new jobs.

Walkup laid out some positive routes for Tucson's future. He's not relying on the status quo and is attempting to blend our community's desire for economic prosperity and environmental preservation.

We look to Walkup for the transformational leadership it will take to draw a map for those routes and move our community forward.

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