

## AN OPEN LETTER TO MAYOR ADLER AND THE AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL

Dear Mr. Mayor and Council:

I am aware, Mr. Mayor, that when we talked recently, I agreed to drop the questions I had raised on your initiatives but you keep bringing up new ideas that I feel must be addressed.

I voted for you and raised money for you, but I did not expect that you would try to run the City single-handedly, You have told me and others that you are not trying to change the form of government but your actions raise questions in many of our minds.

We have a council – culturally diverse as the city, with a wide variety of experience in their background. You have a city manager and 10,000 dedicated employees. The voters at the last election expressly rejected the idea of concentration of power and instead, voted for dispersion of such power. . Thus, we expect you to be a leader with big ideas, but not a person who has to dominate every aspect of city operations, -- with a staff that overwhelms the council and manager. There really is an important role for the council and the administrative staff.

You continually refer to having a bigger burden with the adoption of the 10-1 system. I remind you that , with the exception of Austin's incremental growth, you have no more constituents than did Mayor Leffingwell or the mayors before him. He presided over roughly 800,000 citizens and you have the same number.

Secondly, with all due respect, I think repeated references to LA and NYC are meaningless. We have 2 cities in Texas that Austin can and should compare itself to. Both San Antonio and Dallas are considerably larger than Austin and operate under the same council-manager form as does Austin. Both are world-class cities as we strive to be.

Mayor Rawlings in Dallas, WITH NO MORE AUTHORITY THAN THE AUSTIN CHARTER GIVES YOU AND NO MORE STAFF THAN PREVIOUS AUSTIN MAYORS HAVE HAD, has given strong leadership in Dallas, challenging the educational establishment and making progress,

with strong DALLAS NEWS support, in integrating South Dallas (the East Austin of Dallas) into the economic mainstream of the city. And now, Dallas has been given international recognition for its architecture in its proud Museum District. These are successes in Dallas which have been accomplished with a minimum staff and authority in the mayor's office.

San Antonio, with a history of over 60 years of council-manager government, has had a succession of outstanding mayors, dating back to Lila Cockrell, Henry Cisneros, and Julian Castro. In contrast to Dallas – business oriented, home of the “Big Rich” -- San Antonio is ethnically diverse, has a lower per capita income, and a much larger geographic area to govern. Again, the mayor's office has a minimum staff and the **MAYOR HAS NO MORE CHARTER AUTHORITY THAN YOU DO..**

The two commonalities in city governance which the two cities share is they operate with a shared governance model – the mayor, the council, and the city manager AND the two mayors “lead “ not by overwhelming the city council and the manager but by force of their personality and leadership style.

I am particularly concerned now over your wanting to use vacant positions in the city to staff your office. Those positions were established because of a specific need; you put the city manager in an impossible position when you unilaterally request that he transfer employees to your office. You also upset the balance of power between your office and council members – and the city manager.

I urge this City Council to question why you need a staff of 15 or 20 persons when previous Austin mayors and current mayors of Dallas and San Antonio have and are succeeding with a fraction of that number. If it is indeed contemplated to move vacant positions to the mayor's office, I also urge the Council to require that this be done in a formal, transparent way .

It has been reported that you have told council members that you will make these proposed staff positions in your office available to council members, but they will certainly be beholden first and foremost to you . And it might be noted, council members now have one-tenth the number of constituents compared to former councils.

In your campaign Mr. Mayor, you stated that you would take 100 days to assess the situation and learn the ropes of being mayor. You have now been in office less than half that time and you are already proposing major changes to a government that has operated successfully for more than 90 years in this model.. There's only one holdover on this council,. The new office responsibilities which the other 9 have are unlike anything that many of them have experienced. I urge you to step back and give this new council and yourself time to get "up to speed" on the many complexities of city governance.

Respectfully yours,

Terrell Blodgett

Among Professor Blodgett's previous positions, he served as a governmental consulting principal with the international accounting firm of Peat, Marwick (now KPMG). Responsible for over 200 consulting engagements in local and state government, his work included engagements with the strong mayor cities of Houston, New Orleans, and Baton Rouge.