

A Difficult Decision
Council President Scott Peters, First District
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La Jolla Village News

The question of whether to build a bridge connecting North and South University City and/or widen Genesee Avenue has been perhaps the most difficult issue that I have encountered as a representative of District 1. That's saying a lot, considering what's happened in the past six years! I have never had an issue that so divided a neighborhood and on which I believed that both viewpoints were right.

This is a great community. The residents of University City are tireless advocates for their streets, their library and their parks, especially the Swanson Pool and Standley Park. There is no community that works as well together on its public school, as UC does through "Educate!" UC works together at the University City Community Association, volunteering for community beautification and cleanups, things that bring a neighborhood together. But the debate over the bridge and the widening has divided them.

Over the past few months, I received hundreds of calls, letters and emails and met with dozens of community members. I was impressed by the passion and civic pride expressed by each of them.

The promise I made to constituents and interest groups when I was elected was that I would look hard at the issue, make my recommendation, and bring this to a conclusion. It has dominated the community for years, as decisions were deferred and deferred.

I have known for months and years that whatever I decided would really upset a large part of the community. I understand that and accept it.

There were three major issues that influenced my decision to support Mayor Sanders' recommendation to build the Regents Road bridge and remove the Genesee widening proposal from the University Community Plan. At the top of the list are traffic and public safety. Doing nothing does not solve the problem. I feel that the Regents Road bridge is the best way to improve connectivity, reduce police and fire response time, distribute the allocation of traffic within the community and provide an evacuation route in case of emergency.

Respecting our planning process is also very important. Community plans are designed to help us match development with the infrastructure needed to support it. We should honor the intent of the University Community Plan, UC's guiding document.

The final issue that weighed heavily on me was the impact a bridge would have on Rose Canyon. There is a lot of exaggeration about the canyon. Some say it's absolutely pristine, like Yosemite, and a bridge would absolutely destroy it. Others point to the

heavy and light rail train tracks, sewer lines, power lines, invasive species, and say that the bridge won't make a bit of difference.

I believe that the record shows that the truth is in the middle. While this may not be the most pristine or best natural canyon in the world, or even in my district, it is a beautiful place that provides a wonderful recreational amenity to the neighboring community. The people who love and protect the canyon are sincere and committed, and they have done a wonderful job of explaining their point of view.

There is no question that building the Regents Road bridge will change Rose Canyon. But the city has built bridges over much more significant canyons and resources than this one, and the reason we build bridges is to preserve the resources. Look at the bridge over Peñasquitos Lagoon on Coast Highway. It's a beautiful, award winning bridge, and people love the resource. Look at how we are developing near Carmel Valley and Rancho Peñasquitos, where the voters in 1998 approved huge new growth. We are identifying, preserving and bridging our wildlife corridors, while making these communities a great place to live.

The process of designing the Regents Road bridge will be a long one, and one in which I hope the community will be willing to participate. I hope that entire community, on all sides of this issue, will agree to participate in a full and civil discussion about design and architecture. We can build this bridge while protecting our unique canyon environment and preserving the character of our community. I look forward to working with all of you to make that happen.