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City Hall's version of the Golden Rule: Do as we say, not as we do



San Diego Councilmember Vivian Moreno is shown at a Jan. 27 meeting of the City Council. (Michael Ho / For The San Diego Union-Tribune)



By **U T EDITORIAL BOARD**

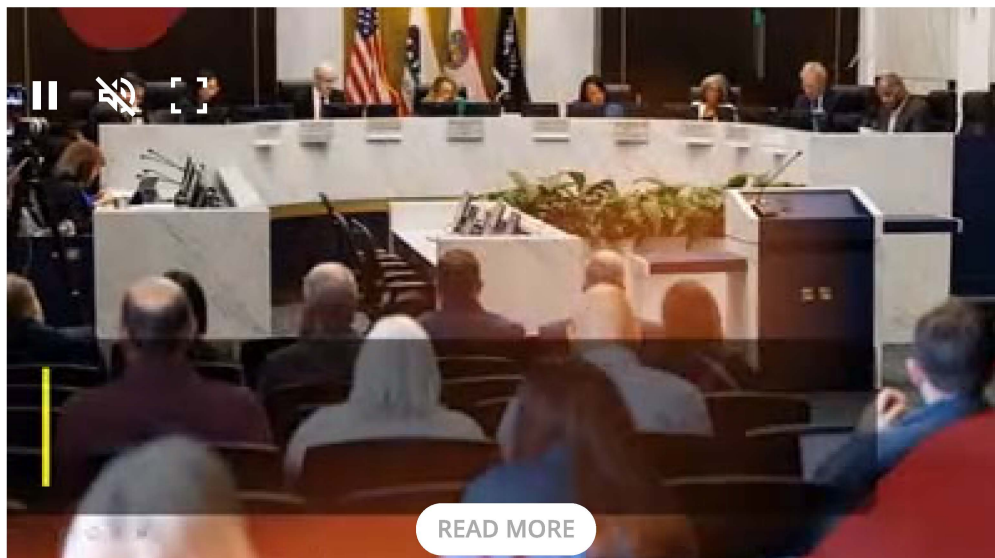
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Most of San Diego's elected leaders keep confirming that they can't be trusted. There's their hypocrisy about the "digital divide" — it's awful when supermarkets inconvenience people who aren't tech-savvy but not when city parking programs do far worse. There's the two-facedness about "fairness" and affordability — Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera nobly criticizes all the evil corporations and out-of-towners that he says are [exploiting](#) San Diegans, then embraces the city's plans to hammer residents, especially poorer ones, by adding to existing fees or creating new ones.

And at the top of the ladder is Mayor Todd Gloria, who never hesitates to offer preposterous descriptions of his administration's actions. This was on display in early January. After the disastrous rollout of paid parking at Balboa Park, the U-T [reported](#) that he argued "the new system is functioning well and being 'actively adopted'" — even as he suspended the [collection of fees](#).

Friday also marks the anniversary of a phone interview Gloria did with a U-T editorial writer about his administration's trash fee machinations. A narrow majority of city voters approved a 2022 ballot measure that allowed the city to begin charging single-family homeowners for picking up their garbage and recyclables after being told monthly charges would be as little as \$23. Instead, last February, Gloria proposed an initial \$53 fee, going up to \$65 in 2027.

In the interview, Gloria rejected the widespread belief that this was a classic bait and switch. He said the reason the city's 2022 analysis of costs was so far off was because it reflected a lower level of services than [residents actually wanted](#) based on "hundreds of community meetings" held over two years. Huh? This isn't spin so much as self-serving delusion.



Now the fallout from the trash fee con job is providing fresh evidence that city leaders think no one notices their selective insistence on transparency and good governance. Councilmember Raul Campillo — a sharp critic of how the fee was crafted and imposed — proposed requiring that city assertions about proposed new or higher fees be substantiated in a comprehensive analysis before ever reaching the ballot. But on Wednesday, the City Council's Rules Committee rejected the proposal, contending "it would expand bureaucracy and shrink council power," as the U-T [reported](#).

"Transparency in government is something I have always strived for. However, today's discussion — in my opinion — is not about transparency," Councilmember Vivian Moreno declared. "This item on the surface appears reasonable, but in practice it creates additional hurdles — and more hurdles are not what our government needs."

Campillo's response was spot-on: "Shouldn't we be extremely thorough, to know how policies are going to impact people?" he said. "I don't think speed is more important than diligence."

Still, given Moreno's criticism of the deceitful tactics of Metropolitan Transit System bureaucrats, Campillo could have been much harsher. To lessen short-term budget headaches, agency officials wanted the MTS board to approve a plan to reduce funding for employee pensions by \$37.3 million over the next seven years at its Feb. 12 meeting.

But these officials treated the board like City Hall treats city residents, refusing to disclose the overall long-term cost of the pension maneuver in briefing materials given to Moreno and her fellow MTS board members. After Moreno repeatedly objected, agency staff "provided an initial guess" of \$25 million to \$40 million and "told Moreno that estimate would have to suffice," according to a U-T [report](#). "Only after San Diego Councilmember Stephen Whitburn, chair of the MTS board, demanded a more complete calculation did staff take the time to add the numbers up and arrive at \$51 million — more than double their low-end estimate."

MTS staffers wanted to con the MTS board by hiding the cost of their proposal, and Moreno's appropriate demand for a comprehensive analysis led to confirmation it was a bait and switch. The council member doesn't mind such tactics when they're used to manipulate city voters — just when they're used to manipulate her.

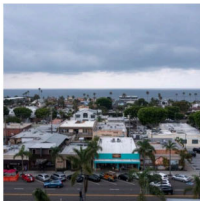
The painfully funny coda to this story is that the MTS board still approved the pension scheme over the objections of Moreno and Chula Vista Mayor John McCann. The [1996 decision](#) of San Diego's elected leaders to intentionally underfund pension obligations has haunted city finances ever since, but lessons apparently weren't learned. We're still ["Enron-by-the-Sea."](#)

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