

103 Bins, Zero Flies

The Big Story

By Rick Boettger

I really like Tony Yaniz. He was the lone Commissioner who fought to get two-way traffic back to North Roosevelt Boulevard, saving desperate local businesses. I know he is always on the job, and believe he always tries to do what is good for his district and the city.

But on returning to twice/week garbage pickup, we respectfully disagree, as in “Tony, you gotta be kiddin’ me!” We met by chance last Wednesday afternoon and I asked if I could get city staff to go out and survey his district for the “stench” and “flies” supposedly thriving because of the once/week pickup. He said waste pickup is Thursday morning, why don’t I do it myself?

So I did. Got out there by 5:15 just ahead of the waste trucks. I surveyed three parts of his wide-spread district, just as I have done twice in my own Old Town district.

The big story is that New Town garbage is even cleaner than Old Town’s. On my Old Town surveys, I saw four flies one time and seven another, plus the outlier that proves there are plenty of flies around if the garbage exists to draw them: a thousand flies were buzzing furiously over a four-pound box of rotting hamburger stuck to the bottom of an emptied bin, filling it with a nightmare cloud (I called Waste Management to handle it).

In a letter to the commissioners, I asked why we should have a second pickup if, say, only one out of fifty bins had a problem. So I decided to check out 100 bins, to see if, say, two had flies. Flies have better senses of smell than we do. A smell we might not notice will attract a fly. Flies mean stinky, and it is easier to spot flies than to go sniffing around every bin.

So I drove around pulling up close enough to the bins to see any flies that might be hanging out. It was warm and calm, perfect stinky weather. But in a half hour of driving around inspecting garbage bins, I saw NOT A SINGLE FLY. After I reached my 100 quota, there were 3 more bins to the end of the street, explaining the 103 in the title.

Tony is trying to sell this as a “health” and “public safety” issue. But the only evidence of any garbage problems is unsupported allegations of “stench” and “maggots.” I say by the evidence of my own eyes that these allegations are false. People in this town know how to put their wet garbage into plastic bags before dumping it in the bin. If someone is dumb enough to dump their fish guts into the bin without being bagged, twice a week won’t make any difference. You could have 7 day/week pickups and those numbskulls’ garbage would still smell.

Only Waste Management will benefit from a cool half million bucks of our money going into their pockets. The extra pickup addresses a problem that simply doesn’t exist, and any stench problem that might affect 1 in 200 (I already tried 100) is not going to be fixed by the extra pickup—the key is packaging your wet garbage in plastic bags.

Worse, to serve the mythical one in 100+ with a self-caused stench problem, we all suffer the clutter of the bins on our streets twice as often, and the traffic congestion caused by the cumbersome trucks and their frequent stops.

Tony, I love ya’, man. You were in the trenches with me on the Boulevard, and you throw your heart and energy every day into working for the public good. I just think you got this one wrong. Let the people at a referendum tell us all whether we need the expense and bother of an extra pickup that addresses an imaginary problem that the second pickup wouldn’t fix.

Uh, People, will you bother to vote?