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## **Sen. Rodríguez responds to City Council re Duranguito**

**El Paso** – State Sen. José Rodríguez responded to members of El Paso City Council who wrote a letter to him justifying the city's actions in trying to place a sports arena in historic Duranguito, the first platted neighborhood in the city.

**In the letter, Sen. Rodríguez notes the successful court challenges to date, the city's responses to its losses, and the processes through which it has acted.**

*The larger, more concerning issue is the process and manner in which the City has acted. Since its inception, the Downtown Plan was developed and has been carried out with merely a semblance of transparency and accountability that has now been exposed in the courts of law. The pattern is clear: devising ambiguous language for the bond ordinance; razing City Hall without seeking public input; developing a downtown plan without meaningful public input; and the surreptitious bulldozing of historic buildings in Duranguito. Add to this, the City ignoring the rule of law.*

*... As you know, the Travis County Court — after careful review of the bond ordinance language and the City's evidence — found a sports arena was **not** what the voters approved to be built in the 2012 election. It's important for the public to understand this, since the City continues to obfuscate this judicial finding.*

*... Frankly, it is irresponsible for the City to continue to claim that El Pasoans approved a downtown sports arena. That is simply not true. We voted for a "quality of life" bond that included among other items, library improvements, a children's museum, a Hispanic Cultural Center, and a multipurpose performing arts and entertainment facility. The words "sports" or "sports arena" are nowhere to be found on the ordinance or the ballot. Also not on the ballot was the proposed location of the multipurpose center. Simply put, voters did not approve demolishing Duranguito to make way for a multipurpose center.*

*Most recently, the City claimed to be powerless to halt the demolition of buildings in Duranguito in the face of a decision by the 8<sup>th</sup> Court of Appeals that showed utter*

*disregard for the Court's order, at worst, and a lack of good faith, at best. This reaction to the Court's order necessitated a second order, which provided explicit instructions to the City "to suspend any and all demolition permits."*

**He also notes the uniqueness of El Paso, and the need to preserve not only our major structures, but the neighborhoods that give the city its character and vitality.**

*As I have stated before, many cities have a sports arena but most cities do not have the rich multicultural heritage that El Paso does. Given El Paso's history, culture, binational flavor and other attributes, we should not seek to clone ourselves in the image of any other city in America. We should take pride in our city's Mexican heritage; it should be embraced, celebrated, and most importantly, protected against those who seek to diminish it. El Paso's unique heritage is not only in large multi-story buildings such as the Plaza Hotel. History and heritage also reside in the humble buildings of our old neighborhoods. These historic neighborhoods, from Duranguito, Chihuahuita, and Segundo Barrio to Sunset Heights to Manhattan Heights to Lincoln Park to the Chamizal to the Mission Valley, should all be preserved and treasured.*

*Duranguito is the type of neighborhood the City promotes in documents such as the award-winning Plan El Paso. It is walkable and urban, and its impending demolition raises uncomfortable questions for all of us: Do low-income residents not deserve the quality urban lifestyle we are trying to build? Why destroy one of the few neighborhoods that already matches the proclaimed vision to create an entertainment "option" for others?*

**Sen. Rodríguez addresses the city's attacks on him and others who object to the city's actions, seeks dialogue on options to restore the neighborhood, and repeats requests made by himself and three other members of the state delegation to: commit to 24-hour police at the attempted demolition site, stabilize the damaged buildings to prevent further destruction, and remove the demolition requirement to close on the sale of properties. The first two requests also were made by Bishop Seitz.**

*We all have the best intentions for our community, and we can disagree about our respective views on how best to continue the progress we have made in El Paso.*

*I will continue to work with the City on the many issues that affect our community, but personal attacks that I am opposed to progress in El Paso or that my remarks were intended to create racial division are simply unwarranted and unproductive. After more than 40 years of public service, my record speaks for itself. In fact, if the City is interested in working towards a real solution to this seemingly never-ending exchange of combative communications among so many of us, I, for one, do not think it is too late. I am ready to put our differences aside and try to bring people together in a sincere and diligent attempt to resolve our issues.*

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*José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Natural Resources and Economic Development; Transportation; Veteran Affairs and Border Security; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs (Vice Chair).*