

COMMENTARY

# Sculley right to pursue public safety contract revisions

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City Manager Sheryl Sculley has made great strides forward since arriving in San Antonio, and she is on the right track pursuing more affordable contracts with public safety employees.

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San Antonio residents have a deep history with the council-manager form of government and have long reaped the value of this structure.

The council-manager plan is adopted in the city's charter and places governmental authority in the hands of the city council, which sets policy for the community. The administrative functions of the city are clearly assigned by charter to the city manager, who is appointed by the council. Employees of the city report to the city manager.

One of the key responsibilities of city managers, at the direction of the council, is to ensure that residents receive exemplary public safety services while public safety professionals enjoy competitive wages and benefits.

These objectives are not mutually exclusive and, in fact, when well done, work hand in glove to meet community safety objectives.

As a core service, public safety resides in the general fund of the city budget and exists apart from the other funds, such as voter approved bonds, aviation funds, or garbage collection fees. Only general funds can be used to offset public safety costs.

The challenges associated with the cost of providing excellent municipal services are not unique to San Antonio. Cities across the state and country are wrestling with public safety wages and benefits consuming a majority of city general fund budgets.

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As the city professionals negotiate labor union contracts, elected officials provide

policy direction and have ultimate approval authority.

San Antonio City Manager Sheryl Sculley is one of the nation's most accomplished professionals, with more than 40 years of city management experience. She oversees a \$2.4 billion city budget and manages nearly 12,000 employees.

The community has benefited markedly from her experience and accomplishments, as demonstrated by San Antonio being recognized as the best financially managed big city in the U.S., with an AAA General Obligation bond rating from the top three financial rating services.

Other city achievements under Ms. Sculley's management include:

Recruiting and appointing top talent for all executive-level positions, including both police and fire chiefs.

Balancing nine city budgets while recommending decreasing city property tax rates three times.

Adding nearly 500 police officers and firefighters while reducing 1,200 civilian positions.

Implementing two largest voter-approved bond programs in the city's history totaling \$1.2 billion for streets, drainage, and parks.

By any measure, these are incredible accomplishments. And when the structural turnover among San Antonio elected officials is considered — Ms. Sculley has worked with 40 different elected officials during her nine-year tenure — these accomplishments gain even more stature.

Ms. Sculley has poured herself into San Antonio, both professionally and personally. She led the effort to bring the Rock and Roll Marathon to San Antonio. She also serves on the United Way board of directors and chaired the 2013 United Way campaign raising a record \$52.5 million for the community.

It is our hope that as Ms. Sculley continues to pursue the policy direction of the majority of

the council in the ongoing process of balancing public safety needs and budget capacity that the conversation will focus on the challenging issues and not on the administrative manager.

*The writers represent the International City/County Management Association.*

