

2010 Update From Your Councilwoman

February 2, 2010

Dear Neighbors and Friends,

I hope that 2010 has gotten off to a great start for you. Throughout the City and District 3 there are signs of new approaches, perspectives and even a daffodil or two to signal a new season on its way in a few weeks. With all this activity, let me bring you up to date on several important matters.

CITY ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCES

City Council decided to suspend its search for a new City Manager in late December and instead extended a one-year contract to Interim City Manager Steve Gantt. I believe that this was the appropriate step to take as we approach municipal elections for Mayor and new Council members this April. Mr. Gantt has brought much needed stability to City Hall and has helped put our financial house back in order. Under his leadership, operational expenses have been carefully scrutinized and, at mid year, we are approximately \$5 million dollars under budget. If revenue projections hold and if no emergencies arise, we should be able to begin rebuilding our depleted General Fund reserves at the end of this fiscal year.



Columbia City Manager
Steve Gantt

BUDGET CONCERNS

As we begin our consideration of next year's budget, please know that funding for public safety and basic services will remain my top priorities. Mr. Gantt has reminded Council of our critical need to address capital expenses for replacement vehicles with our Police, Fire, and Public Works fleet. The City Manager shared a preliminary plan last week outlining... [Read more.](#)

PROPOSED TAX INCREMENT FINANCE



DISTRICTS



In my email last November I mentioned that Council was considering plans to create two Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts that would target blighted areas in North Columbia and in the "Innovista" for redevelopment. These proposed TIF plans, in partnership with Richland County and Richland School District One, would have authorized up to \$190 million dollars of debt over the next 25 years. While I certainly recognize our need to address blight in these areas, I have serious reservations

about... [Read more.](#)

PAYDAY LENDING

Many of you have written me about your concerns regarding payday lending businesses and their negative impact on neighborhoods and commercial corridors. I am pleased to report that despite intensive lobbying efforts by representatives of the payday lending industry, City Council approved regulations last week on where these businesses may locate in the future. [Read more.](#)

A REFERENDUM ON OUR FORM OF GOVERNMENT

In recent years considerable attention has focused on whether or not Columbia should change its current Council-Manager form, which places administrative authority for city operations in an appointed City Manager, to the Mayor-Council (Strong Mayor) form, which would give more responsibility to the elected Mayor. [Read more.](#)



MAYORAL FORUMS

On April 6th the residents of our City will select a new mayor, our first in twenty years. I hope that you will make every effort to talk with the various candidates and share your thoughts and vision for our City. There will be a number of Mayoral debates and forums before the election and [here is a link to those scheduled](#) up to this point.

I especially want to bring the forum scheduled for this Thursday, February 4th, to your attention. It will be held at Eastminster Presbyterian Church, 3200 Trenholm Road, at 7:00 PM in the Education Building behind the Church. Several District 3 neighborhoods, including Forest Hills, Pinehurst, and Melrose will be co-hosts along with a number of nearby District 4 neighborhoods. Former *State* newspaper editorial page editor, Brad Warthen, will be the moderator. [Click here for directi! ons.](#)

In closing, let me again express my appreciation for



Hollywood/Rose Hill Leaders

the honor of representing you on Columbia City Council. The past month has been filled with wonderful events around our City, and I have enjoyed seeing many of you in attendance-- in Five Points at the historic marker event

commemorating Dr. King;

at the special luncheon honoring four extraordinary Medal of Honor recipients; at neighborhood meetings in Rosewood, Shandon, Edisto Court, Christopher Towers, and Bradley; at the Mayor's State of the City address; and at the special lecture I had the pleasure of delivering at the Shepherd's Center on the history of Columbia. Everywhere I go I marvel at the great talent of our citizens and at their commitment to ensuring the future of our city.

I hope our paths will cross often in 2010, and, as always, I [welcome your thoughts](#) and ideas about our Columbia.

Sincerely,

Belinda Gergel
Columbia City Council, District 3 Representative