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July 4, 2019

VIA EMAIL: finance.advisory@culvercity.org

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Finance Advisory Committee
City of Culver City – City Hall
9770 Culver Boulevard
Culver City, CA 90232

Re: July 10, 2019 Meeting
Proposed Agenda Item – Effective Suggestion/Idea System

Committee Members:

The Finance Advisory Committee (Committee) Quarterly Report – March 2019 states that the Committee "was established in 2013 to provide advice to the City Council based on specific tasks or duties approved by the City Council, which include ... methods through which the City can reduce expenditures...." The State of California's website describes the value of an effective suggestion/idea system by stating, in part, "Thousands of suggestions have been adopted since the program began in 1950, resulting in millions of dollars in savings to the state."

When it comes to suggestion/idea systems, does Culver City more resemble the former Soviet Union or Toyota Motor Corporation? Soviet Union Premier Joseph Stalin ordered each state enterprise to implement a formal suggestion/idea system. Each did, but the managers reported that no employee made any suggestion. The managers lied. Each manager disregarded all suggestions for fear that any resulting improvement to the respective manager's operations could be used as evidence that the manager had previously wasted state assets—a capital offense. On the other hand, Toyota's employees make hundreds of suggestions each year, most of which are implemented. Culver City is definitely no Toyota.

Culver City has a hard-to-find-bare-bones-online "Suggestion Form," which I located after searching Culver City's website for "suggestion system." There is no information about how

the entire system operates. I identified myself, set forth my suggestion of implementing a formal suggestion/idea system and pressed "Submit." A few days later, I received an acknowledgment of receipt stating, in part, "Your suggestions have been forwarded to the respective departments."

Professionals have long known that Culver City's equivalent of a suggestion box is not effective. "[T]he suggestion box has become the method of choice for seeking employee ideas. Despite modern touches—such as collecting ideas by e-mail, web-based applications, or special hot lines—the underlying process is the same as it was in the nineteenth century. ... The strange thing is that everyone knows that suggestion boxes don't work." (*Ideas Are Free—How the Idea Revolution Is Liberating People and Transforming Organizations* by Robinson and Schroeder, p. 93.)

Further, Culver City expends large sums of money sending employees to seminars and training sessions, but that expenditure does not result in any suggestion/idea. In response to my Public Records Act request concerning seminars and training sessions, Culver City was not able to produce any record "indicating what was learned and [setting forth] how it can/will be put into use for the City." (My related suggestion is: re-examine whether sending employees to seminars and training sessions is beneficial or necessary.)

Culver City could easily establish a productive formal suggestion/idea system. It is not rocket science. "While every organization should design its process according to its unique needs, certain characteristics are common to all high-performing idea systems: 1. Ideas are encouraged and welcomed. 2. Submitting ideas is simple. 3. Evaluation of ideas is quick and effective. 4. Feedback is timely, constructive, and informative. 5. Implementation is rapid and smooth. 6. Ideas are reviewed for additional potential. 7. People are recognized, and success is celebrated. 8. Idea system performance is measured, reviewed, and improved." (*Id.*, p. 121.)

Suggesting ideas to improve Culver City should be a part of every employee's job description. Culver City's website states, in part, "Not only do we offer a competitive salary range, but an excellent benefit package." Numerous employees receive more than \$400,000 per annum. For that compensation, each employee should be required to provide useful suggestions to make Culver City government more effective.

Please communicate with me if further information is desired.

Yours truly,

Les Greenberg

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