



## Thoughts ..... Landlords of Manhattan Forum – Thursday 21 February

I can handle the heavy snow, being a tough Kansas Hero and all.

Unfortunately not all of the candidates have the same vigor as a Kansas Tall Tale Hero. The heavy snow did not cancel the Landlords of Manhattan City Commission Forum. Five of the candidates attended, Rich Jankovich, Bob Strawn, John Ball, Daniel Hogan and Usha Reddi. Karen McCulloh and Debbie Nuss were not present.

The candidates had ample time to answer questions as no time limit was imposed. Seven questions or topics were addressed by the candidates.

1. What is your reason for running for office?
2. The rental inspection program – should it be reinstated?
3. The City Debt & Property Tax.
4. The Library Expansion.
5. Public transportation aTa.
6. The LGBT ordinance.
7. The Pedestal on the roundabout at Walgreens.

I was able to hear the proceedings and took some notes on the candidate responses. Here is what the candidates communicated concerning the seven topics and my *"word to capture the comments"*.

Rich Jankovich – a synopsis:

Candidate Jankovich is an incumbent on the City Commission. He is running for reelection to continue his service. He discussed city ethics and explained that he does not vote on all items because of his employment. Ethical conflicts result in his recusal from a number of votes. He stated that he would not be interested in further discussion of the rental inspection program and would not bring the item up for review. Rich stated that one of the longest city work sessions was about the rental program. On the debt and property tax issue Rich stated that the mil levy was driven by the outside agencies like the RCPD and that the city was doing a good job. He addressed the issue of possible review of City/County consolidation stating that he voted to consolidate the health department as a cost saving, but the end result was that personnel cost at the health department increased. On the Library expansion issue Commissioner Jankovich stated that he was unsure at present how he would vote. He talked about the 6 mil taxing authority that the library board may levy. On the public transportation issue, Rich mentioned that he voted yes on the item during his first term on the commission, but would not vote yes at the present time. He mentioned that he supported the fixed route aTa system the first time because the city did not have adequate taxi service. Since the vote that has changed, so at present he would not support a tax subsidy. Commissioner Jankovich stated that he did not desire for the commission to review the LGBT ordinance. It was not his intention to make the ordinance an agenda

item. On the discussion concerning the pedestal for a possible statue or other item, Rich stated that the city had committed \$20,000 to the project and that the rest should be raised through private funds.

*Obfuscate; to make obscure, to be evasive, unclear, or confusing; is the main impression I have of Commissioner Jankovich's comments. He came out against furthering the rental inspection and LGBT agenda. He stated the same last election cycle. But he voted yes for the rental program and the LGBT agenda. He also voted yes to support aTa, but stated at the forum that he would not subsidize the program. Commissioner Jankovich spoke about lowering the debt, but at the last City Commission debt meeting for the 2013 debt he voted with Commissioners Sherow and Pepperd to cut off further discussion on debt reduction. Commissioner Jankovich stated that he was not sure how he would vote on the library expansion, but two weeks ago at a city work session he stated that he could support a compromise of the library staying under a 6 mil levy for five years and then exceeding the levy for the next five. In other words he supports the library expansion at a cost of 6 mils for five years and at whatever the cost is for the next five. On the roundabout statue Commissioner Jankovich stated that 20 thousand dollars was committed to the project by the city. This is not entirely correct, as the resolution on that matter was worded as a maximum of 20 thousand; the Commission can still vote zero for the project. Obfuscate is clearly the word. You can flip a coin on how Commissioner Janikovich will vote as it is anybody's guess. But the track record of the past two years indicates that what is said is not what is done.*

Bob Strawn – a synopsis:

Former Mayor and Commissioner Strawn is ready to step back into public office to help control the huge city debt – twice the mil levy of Lawrence Kansas - and to study possible consolidation of local government into one entity; combine RCPD, City of Manhattan and Riley County. Bob Strawn spoke about the city ethics policy and stated that his connections to the rental market would prevent him from casting a vote on the rental inspection program. He did however state that he would not support putting this item back on the Commission agenda. It takes three commissioners to put an item on the agenda. Bob was clear on his intent to help lower the city debt. He mentioned that the debt was a priority over the library. One of his main goals is to set up a task force to study consolidation efforts to see if fundamental change in government structure can in fact help us contain our debt. Mr. Strawn stated he would not support the library expansion. He wondered why we do not make better use of the library facilities added to the USD in the recent bond issue. Bob Strawn made a case for aTa being viable if it was supported by KSU and student fees. He believes that 70% of any subsidy to aTa for fixed route service should be provided by KSU. He further indicated that he would support a subsidy of 30%. Bob voted against the LGBT ordinance when he was on the City Commission and has not adjusted his view on the ordinance. Bob helped to fund the pedestal in question. He believes that it should be finished. He advocates placing an obelisk on the pedestal or tearing it down and planting grass.

*Pithy, having substance, cogent and to the point is how Mr. Kaw views Bob Strawn's comments. I watched his four previous years on the commission and do not recall any surprises. What you see is what you get. He clearly articulated his views on the seven topics at hand. While I hate to see an obelisk compete with my magnificent presence, I can live with the result.*

John Ball – a synopsis:

John Ball is running for office because he believes we need to get a handle on the city debt. He mentioned concern about those city residents that are on a fixed income and wondered if we were not in the process of taxing them out of their homes. John wants to see us balance our income with our expenditures. He is for a focus on core projects and achieving a fiscal balance between quality of life, core projects and the wants of the community. John Ball does not support the rental inspection program, as it is government intrusion into private business. Mr. Ball advocates attacking the debt by establishing some goals like a minimum 1 million dollar reduction per year, easily attainable with the recent ½ sales tax and the portion dedicated to debt relief. He also thought that maybe a parallel runway at the airport should be a priority over terminal expansion. John wants to see a long term plan to put the city on a glide path of debt reduction. He would like the library board to find some more creative solutions to the issue of space for the Children’s reading program. Other options are possible instead of a massive and costly library expansion. John does not support the increased debt that will result from library expansion. Fixed route bus service with government subsidy is not on Mr. Ball’s agenda. But, John fully supports continued subsidy of the on demand service provided by aTa. John Ball will not support revisiting the LGBT ordinance. The pedestal is an item that should not be added to the city debt, so John supports having private donations to complete the project.

***Symmetry, Balanced, Proportion, harmony; very much in line with my Statue; is how I viewed John Ball’s comments. John was very direct on his policy views of debt and understands the relationship between input – revenue and expenditures – the stuff the city funds. Symmetry needs to exist between core projects, special interest groups, programs for the needy and just nice to have items. I trust John Ball’s balanced approach.***

Daniel Hogan – a synopsis of comments on the seven topics:

Daniel seems to running for office for a number of reasons. He dislikes some city ordinances that might be out of date, especially some of the ordinances on vicious dogs and gun control. He joked about being the dog ordinance candidate, but put emphasis on control of the city debt. As a relatively new two year resident of the community he is concerned about the direction of city government. Daniel is a renter and is solidly against the rental inspection program. He made a clear case for individual not government responsibility for rental properties. On the city debt Daniel Hogan believes we should prioritize expenditures. He used the example of let us fix the runway at the airport before we build a multi-million dollar terminal. Mr. Hogan put the library expansion into the category of frivolous spending. He stated that the library is not at capacity and the expansion at this time is ill advised. Daniel’s view on aTa started with a comment about the empty buses driving around town. Daniel believes that ata should not receive a subsidy for fixed route and should instead come up with a workable business model. Mr. Hogan is for 100% equal treatment of citizens under the law. He does not support the re-introduction of the repealed LGBT ordinance because it contains flawed provisions. He outlined the human rights board as one of the major problems with the ordinance. The pedestal should be 100% private funded, Daniel will not support further investment of city dollars.

***Explicit, particular, definitive, is my view of Daniel's comments. He put forth very honest answers and had no problem joking about himself as the "Dog Ordinance Guy". Daniel compared the local politics to his original home in Alabama, making the point that citizens in Manhattan seem to be more interested and better informed than folks from his former home state. Mr. Hogan was much in line with and agreed with the comments provided by candidates Strawn and Ball. With Daniel Hogan as a commissioner we will not be guessing as to how he will vote.***

Usha Reddi – a synopsis of comments on the seven topics:

Mrs. Reddi indicated that she was running for office because she had a desire to serve the community. She stated that she enjoyed people and would listen to everyone. Usha did not really provide a yes or no answer to the rental inspection questions. Instead she indicated that effort should be placed in education of renters and that some collaboration should be put in place to control bad landlords. Usha's comments on the city debt tended to deviate into a discussion about education and stray from the actual concept of the city debt. She stated that she would listen to everyone on debt concerns and make a determination to do what was best for the citizens. She did not provide any specifics concerning mil levy or comment on the amount of the city debt. Usha Reddi is a member of the library board and clearly supports expansion of the library and the increased debt burden. Usha mentioned that with NBAF coming on board and the fact the KSU has international students, it is necessary to fund aTa with tax subsidy. On the LGBT issue Mrs. Reddi stated that it was not an item that was on her agenda. Usha supported private funding for the pedestal project.

***Naive, showing a lack of experience, judgment and information is my take on Usha Reddi's comments. My impression was that she really knew very little about the details of the key topics presented. She tended to focus or direct all of her responses to the topic of education, maybe this was due to the fact that she recently ran for the State School Board. Usha put emphasis on listening, listening was important because she felt this was the way to gain information prior to making a determination on issues. It seemed clear from the forum that Mrs. Reddi has few preconceived or expressed notions on the direction of city government except to increase taxes for the library and aTa. All other topics are up in the air and would be determined by the various opinions that are presented to Usha, should she become a City Commissioner. My thought is that any vote cast by Usha might be swayed by the last speaker in the room.***

Karen McCulloh and Debbie Nuss were not present at the Forum so I cannot provide a synopsis of comments on the seven topics. ***But a word popped into mind - elude, avoided the questions due to the winter storm.***

I will be watching and listening to the next few City Commission Forums. Will provide my **thoughts .....**  
**Mr. K.**