

# West Valley View

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## Downtown development next for Tolleson

*Mayor talks Van Buren revitalization, retail and how long he'll keep running for council*

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staff writer

The *West Valley View* sat down with Tolleson Mayor Adolfo Gamez last week to talk about completed projects, what to expect from the city this year and how long he'd like to remain the mayor.

Gamez, 55, has been on the City Council since 1981, and mayor for 17 years.

Here's what he had to say:

***West Valley View:* What big things can the community expect to see from Tolleson this year?**

Mayor Adolfo Gamez: One of the major things we're going to do this year is our downtown streetscape, and we're going to have \$6 million to work with.

So we're going to see how we can improve our downtown. We'll form a committee and look at the ideas they come up with and do what we have to do to make it look appealing with a lot of green and open space.

I think the challenge is going to be how are we going to motivate business people downtown to see how they can reinvest in their buildings?

We need to sit down and talk about it in terms of what strategies can we come up with to help them help us improve all of downtown, and make it a place where people want to come have a good time and spend money.

I'm pretty excited about what downtown will look like when it's done.

***View:* What do you think makes Tolleson stand out among the other West Valley cities?**

Gamez: I think the jobs that we have. We have about 20,000 jobs, and what we did this year with economic development was add another 925. That's a big thing for us.

How we conduct business has a lot to do with people coming to Tolleson. The consistency on council with not having a high turnover rate, not only on the elected official side, but also our staff.

It's easy coming to work knowing what everybody has to do and wants to do. I think they enjoy coming to work, because it's a great place and we treat people with respect and dignity.

When we say it's a family-oriented community, it is. Not to say the others are not, but I think we have more people living here that are from here than are not, so that makes it a lot easier.



TOLLESON MAYOR ADOLFO GAMEZ looks toward downtown Tolleson Jan. 19. View photo by Ray Thomas

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Again, the working relationship we have amongst the council members is fantastic. Rarely do you see a split vote. It's unanimous 99 percent of the time.

Those are the things that make us unique. A lot of people look at us and say it's a little Hispanic community. Yeah, we are. It's never been a negative, though. I loved growing up here; it's home.

We're constantly fighting that stigma, even with all the good things that we do. Being a community that's solvent and doesn't have foreclosure issues that other cities have. The industries that we have that contribute the majority of the dollars to our schools because of the property taxes.

All those things are positive, but people tend not to look at that for whatever reason. We know what we have and we're proud of what we have. I think the future is pretty solid in terms of us continuing that because of our teen council. They know leadership and the importance of giving back to the community.

We have a lot of young folks on the council, not like me, that understand the mission and vision of this community. So we're set.

**View: The last time we sat down for a Q&A in 2006, you said retail was the city's next big quest. How is that coming along?**

Gamez: Retail is still an issue. Not so much as it used to be, but we're still going for it, and we're still getting industries.

One of the new businesses is Marshalls. Here I thought, "All right, we're going to get a Marshalls," but it's not a store, it's a distribution center.

Hopefully, La Entrada is going to happen and that will be some retail for us. We're hoping across the street there on the southeast corner of Van Buren and 91st Avenue will bring some revenue in terms of retail as well.

We're also looking into other sites on McDowell and 91st Avenue. That looks like it may happen, but we can't tell you what it is. When it does hit, it will be big.

Freightliner is beautiful and it's going to generate some revenue for us, big time. There's others coming down the pike, but I hate to say it's coming and it doesn't. I jinx myself, and it happens a lot.

Staples' fulfillment center has been a surprise for us as well. We get a lot of sales revenue from online sales, which we weren't expecting.

**View: We also talked about a few projects that had been stalled and are now complete, such as the police and fire departments and Veterans Park. How does it feel to finally have those done?**

Gamez: Beautiful. I think people are very happy with those developments, especially at the gold LEED certification level. That's fantastic, and not too many cities can sing that tune.

It's something that other cities are taking note of. I know El Mirage has toured the police department. People are just amazed at the beauty and efficiency of both buildings. And our park is great.

**View: Is a new City Hall next for Tolleson?**

Gamez: There's talk about that, but we have different ideas about how we're going to approach it. I don't think it's a high priority right now, because what we have now is functional.

We need to take care of downtown first and then I think we need to start talking about maybe having it somewhere where La Entrada is.

There was a business group looking to buy the southwest corner [of 91st Avenue and Van Buren Street] and converting it into retail with City Hall on top.

Those are just ideas. We are going to do it; we just don't know when. It's going to happen, though.

**View: One more question for you. In 2006, you said you would be running for mayor one more time, but you've since run twice. Will your mayoral career ever end?**

Gamez: That's a good question. You know, I keep saying it's my last term, but I keep running. So I have three years to ponder that question.



I can't commit. I have three years and I might be retired from [Estrella Mountain Community College] by then. I have 33 years in the state retirement system for education, so I can retire now from that system and still stay here.

This job is easy because of the people that are here. I don't have to worry about that. The city's in good hands in terms of administration and staff.

Sometimes it's hard [to think about stepping away], but at the same time there's a lot of things I like to do. I like to golf.

People want me to run for the Legislature, but I don't think so. If I were to stay, I'd stay here. The reason is that you do more being close to the grassroots. You start getting away from it and you start losing it. I've seen it.

Rare is a person that will be at a higher level and continue to be committed to those values when they were at the lower level. It's tough, unless you have people reminding them not to forget about us.

Some people get big heads and forget about where they came from. It's important to always keep an open mind, an open ear and open heart when you're dealing with your community. That's why I would stay.

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