

2016 mayoral hopeful Brand, businessman Cloud clash over Fresno General Plan vote

By John
Ellis

Fresno City Council Member Lee Brand

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Last week, the Fresno City Council approved the controversial 2035 General Plan, a 20-year policy blueprint for the city's future growth pushed by Mayor Ashley Swearengin and approved by a 5-2 vote.

Now comes the politics.

Already at the center is Council Member Lee Brand, a Republican, General Plan supporter — and the one person already on record as a 2016 mayoral candidate. His chief antagonist is influential Republican Tal Cloud, who owns a business in Fresno and lives in Minkler.

“Lee hurt himself by his blind support for the mayor's plan,” Cloud said.

Never one to shy away from speaking his mind, Cloud has not only said the vote could be Brand's downfall, he's also taken it a step further by suggesting that Clint Olivier, Brand's fellow council member, should consider a 2016 mayoral run.

Olivier, Cloud said, would be formidable because he is a libertarian who lives south of Shaw Avenue. It is a position that means he could draw support from the high-propensity Republican voters that live north of Shaw and always weigh in heavily on mayoral elections, and the more Democratic areas in the southern parts of the city.

“If (Olivier) chooses to run for mayor, he could have an interesting base — central, south and north Fresno,” Cloud said. “I would urge him to take a serious look at it.”

Olivier, who opposed the new General Plan along with Steve Brandau, couldn't be reached for comment.

Brand, however, disputed Cloud's assertions.

“Tal Cloud is the self proclaimed pope of Fresno,” Brand said. “If you don't support his position, you're a communist.”

Brand said something had to be done to help Fresno cover its operating costs such as police and fire, and a key to that is helping property values rise in the city's southern part. The General Plan, he said, will move the city in that direction.



Even with the new General Plan's emphasis on infill residential and commercial development on land already within the city's urban footprint, as well as trying to rein in the decades-long patterns of urban sprawl, Brand said there is still a balance that allows new subdivisions at Fresno's edges

"It's a step in the right direction," Brand said of the new General Plan. "It's important to try and rebuild older parts (of the city). This is the first plan in 50 years that didn't expand the sphere of Fresno. That's what I voted on."

Brand also pointed to the string of policy initiatives he's pushed while on the council, such as the Taxpayer Protection Act, which established debt management policies for Fresno, the Labor Management Act, which provided greater financial oversight and analysis in city-labor relations, and the Citizens Concealed Weapons Act, which liberalized the issuance of Concealed Carry Permits for city residents.

But Cloud said Brand has moved too far to the left with some of his votes, and has "not proven himself to be a free market conservative." Speaking specifically to the General Plan, he said "Lee's vote will be better understood in two years than it is today, and it hurts his base."

The political takeaway of this may be that Fresno's 2016 mayoral race may have just unofficially started.

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