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News | San Diego

## Another city staffer departs over Sunroad scandal

By Jeff McDonald and Jennifer Vigil  
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

11:15 a.m. August 23, 2007

SAN DIEGO – Marcela Escobar-Eck, the Development Services director hired by Mayor Jerry Sanders barely 10 months ago, has left City Hall, Sanders announced Thursday.

Sanders refused to specify whether Escobar-Eck was fired or asked to resign, saying only that he wanted new leadership in the Development Services Department.

From today's U-T:

■ [Waring speaks on departure from city](#)

“We want to make sure we have leadership in our Development Services Department that is putting into effect remedial actions and making sure communication difficulties that we've had in the past are fixed,” Sanders said.

Escobar-Eck is the latest casualty in a burgeoning political scandal over the approval of an office tower near Montgomery Field. The 180-foot building was allowed to be developed despite repeated warnings from federal regulators that it violated air-safety standards.

Escobar-Eck cleared out her office and left City Hall on Wednesday, the mayor said. Sanders withheld announcement of her departure until a previously scheduled interview with *The San Diego Union-Tribune* on Thursday morning.

Last week, former land use and economic development chief James Waring was asked to resign, largely due to his handling of the Kearny Mesa office tower developed by Sunroad Enterprises.

Sanders said today that he does not anticipate any more resignations or terminations at City Hall as a result of the Sunroad controversy, but he did not rule out further action.

“Do I know everything? I don't know,” he said. “I can't say there won't be more, but I don't anticipate more.”

As director of Development Services, Escobar-Eck held broad authority over building permit applications and other projects within the city. She was deeply involved in allowing the Sunroad tower to remain at 180 feet, 20 feet higher than the Federal Aviation Administration said is safe.

In December, Escobar-Eck signed an amendment to a previously issued stop-work order on the Sunroad project. The change allowed the builders to “weatherize” the project and all but complete interior work.

She worked for the city of San Diego for 18 years before accepting a

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development position with the city of Carlsbad in 2005. She was returned to San Diego in October 2006, two months after the Sunroad building rose to 180 feet.

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**By justme on 08/23/2007**

when will the mayor join the list of casualty?

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**By Levelheaded on 08/23/2007**

Holy Toledo - I asked when she would be fired not 2 minutes ago! Everyone at Development Services who has any sort of management role with respect to building permits should be fired or told to resign. This whole episode is completely inexcusable, and the blame should start at the top.

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**By HoyaSaxa on 08/23/2007**

If she was fired, it just goes to show you that Mayor Sanders absolutely cannot help himself with regards to self-inflicting wounds. What is wrong with the guy and his staff? They are clearly a bunch of masochists (although, given the damage they are doing to the city and its residents, they are also sadists).

It's so predictable it's now comical. A problem or crisis will present itself, Sanders will drag his feet and be on the wrong side of the issue for months (all the while damaging his popularity and credibility), and then will, finally, make the right move many months too late.

If he would only make the right moves from the outset (which shouldn't be a problem, since he ultimately up making them in the end anyway), he would have a very high approval rating and would be seen as an effective strong mayor (by a decent majority of the voters). Thus, if he would have taken a firm stand against Sunroad's misconduct at the outset, and fired Escobar-Eck for her incompetence and/or possible corruption much earlier, he would have looked like a hero. Now he just looks like a chump.

Very, very strange.

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**By crazyhorse on 08/23/2007**

Let the UT investigate why Escobar-Eck is really leaving....and write the story....this whole deal with Sunroad really stinks and starts with Mayor Sanders.....

Developers/politicians = Greed,lies,inflating property values,payoff's, and a free lunch....

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**By SDNATIVE on 08/23/2007**

The heads are rolling, I wonder who the new MAYOR will be in America's Finest City????

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**By justme on 08/23/2007**

i think Murphy did not seek re-election once he saw the depth of corruption in politics. i thought Sanders would have greater integrity being the former chief of police...

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**By tangodancer on 08/23/2007**

I wonder when Feldman et al sat back a few years ago and said "dammit we're having that extra 20 feet", if they foresaw even a shadow of the chaos it would create. Surely wasn't worth it for them, especially if it leads to the non re-election of Sanders.

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**By snowman on 08/23/2007**

It's funny: an extra 20 feet for a building above ground could put SD developer's political ambitions 6 feet below ground.

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**By any\_user on 08/23/2007**

Save a seat on the bus for the Mayor! Unless of course he can explain away his boldfaced lies regarding the whole Sunroad issue. Not likely.

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**By BigDog on 08/23/2007**

Funny that the article doesn't mention the emails in the story by vosd  
(<http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/articles/2007/08/22/news/01hasenin082207.txt>)

The building inspector with authority to modify the stop work order, Isam Haseni, declined to sign the order and continue to argue that it was wrong to sign the order. Without his knowledge, the order was suddenly signed by people over his head. He quit and went to SF.

The SF Gove site has an interview welcoming Haseni  
([http://www.sfgov.org/site/dbi\\_page.asp?id=58796](http://www.sfgov.org/site/dbi_page.asp?id=58796))

I thought his first answer was interesting:

Q: Mr. Hasenin, please tell us about why you came to San Francisco after a distinguished career in San Diego?

A: The San Francisco position provided me with an opportunity to further my career since San Francisco is very unique, and the Building Department has a different role than I was used to in San Diego.

Hmm, what do you suppose he means when he says the Building Department in SF "has a different role than I was used to in San Diego"????

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**By Bud\_SD on 08/23/2007**

Haha! Everyone sing "The Witch is Dead". Now she can take her dream job at Sunroad.

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**By ChargerBug on 08/23/2007**

This is a multi-million dollar fiasco from all sides...and totally inexcusable with regards to the city and permits...

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**By DAVADO on 08/23/2007**

Extra Crispy Mayor Sanders!

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**By BigDog on 08/23/2007**

The Voice of San Diego article came out yesterday. I wonder when they received the emails they cite? I'll bet they had to fire Escobar-Eck when the media discovered that email trail. The UT still hasn't mentioned that particular email trail by Haseni, by the way.

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**By The Big Churro on 08/23/2007**

Next up, Freddy Sainz, followed by the closing of the office of ethics and integrity and the departure of SawyerKnoll.

All aboard the Sunroad Express!

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**By BigDog on 08/23/2007**

Looks like Froman got out while the getting was good.

Churro,

How about shutting down the mayors charter reform committee as well? They are trying to require a 75% council vote to override a mayoral line-item veto, and to make the trial period for the strong mayor permanent before we even go through one budget cycle with his new powers.

Naked power grab by a corrupt mayor and the developers who back him. I hope people can understand the connection when the charter vote comes up.

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**By SupremeCourt on 08/23/2007**

Help Wanted:

Development Services Director; City of San Diego.

Salary - \$122,375 - \$146,750 per year, with generous per diem from Sunroad Enterprises.

Experience Required: None. See Mayor Jerry Sanders.

With 655 employees, Development Services is one of the largest departments in the city. Nearly all of its \$69 million budget comes from fees paid for services. About \$6.7 million comes from the city's general fund.

(Next time you hear a city employee emphatically claiming no one gets a taxpayer paid pension higher than 90% of their highest salary, ask them about the IRS S 415 regulation and how much the SDCERS pays in benefits above the IRS's maximum benefit cap.)

SDCERS is the taxpayer paid retirement system for the City of San Diego, Unified Port District and the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority. Click below for more information.  
<http://www.sdcers.org/>

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**By crazyhorse on 08/23/2007**

America's finest city...run by the monkey's in the zoo...

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**By BigDog on 08/23/2007**

By crazyhorse : "Let the UT investigate why Escobar-Eck is really leaving....and write the story....this whole deal with Sunroad really stinks and starts with Mayor Sanders....."

As reported elsewhere (notably La Playa and Flannery) Escobar-Eck has her dubious fingerprints all over this property going back a decade. I would love the UT to do a real, in-depth article on her showing all the steps she and DSD (with Tom Story) took to grant Substantial Conformance Review approval for a 180-foot building on a lot zoned for a 45-foot building. No council decision to change land-use. No EIR for the whopping change. No FAA approval. None of that was accidental.

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**By BigDog on 08/23/2007**

By crazyhorse: "America's finest city...run by the monkey's in the zoo..."

Every time someone pulls out that old slogan, have to laugh. Have you ever wondered just why we are called "Americas finest city"?

Here is a good story on it: <http://www.sdreader.com/php/cityshow.php?id=971>

Basically it was made up by Mayor Wilson to boost morale in San Diego after a long string of scandals that made national news, culminating in the Republicans yanking their convention away from San Diego at the last minute. "Americas Finest City my . It was then, and still is now, an insiders joke to mollify the taxpayers.

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**By crazyhorse on 08/23/2007**

BigDog...thanks for the link...I remember C. Arnholt Smith and John Alessio very well.. and those scandals (I was born here in 1942)...but did not know that "Tag", America's finest city was from Wilson's frustrations.....

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**By FartMan on 08/23/2007**

I was hoping she would get fired over this. I have just been a casual observer but it seemed to me that Ms. Escobar-Eck had to have some culpability in this. Amen to that "ding-dong" Bud\_SD! City government may be corrupt and costing us all big money but at least it's entertaining!

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**By theantispanos on 08/23/2007**

Were George Bush and Sunburned Sanders twins separated at birth? I mean, how can two supposed leaders do such a horrible job of hiring people that are qualified to do the jobs they are given? Jer, you'd better make sure your A/C is working real good, because I think you are in for a winter much warmer than you're accustomed to. And you're running out of people to fire. Open government my backside! You can't say if she was fired or resigned? Either you're afraid of another lawsuit or you're covering for her, because she can help bring you down. This smells worse than the Tijuana River.

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**By donnajeanw on 08/23/2007**

Testing

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**By BigDog on 08/23/2007**

theantispanos: "Were George Bush and Sunburned Sanders twins separated at birth? I mean, how can two supposed leaders do such a horrible job of hiring people that are qualified to do the jobs they are given?"

The answer is simple. They each hired the people they were told to hire by the people that put them in office and control them.

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**By therock on 08/23/2007**

I would like to go into government to become a CROOK like pretty much ALL of them. does anyone know where to start so I can start taking bribes and perks and pad my friends wallets and just generally SCREW the public ?

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**By KingofAllMedia on 08/23/2007**

So when is the UT going to apologize to Mike Aguire for all the bad stories they run against him?

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**By Oerdin on 08/23/2007**

Sanders was Murphy's right hand man so is it any wonder that Sanders has continued Murphy's policies of lies and insider deals for special interests? San Diego's government will continue to be plagued with corruption until we finally throw out the whole good old boy network which has run this city for years.

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**By any\_user on 08/23/2007**

So all that you need to do when you get caught with your hands in the cookie jar is jump ship? What a joke. Then again, the Mayor claimed full responsibility so I guess he better head toward the plank too, the sooner the better.

How's the AG's investigation moving along? How about our trusty DA? Nothing here for her to look into? Nevermind, Sawyer Knoll already found no signs of corruption or misuse of power, why waste Bonnie's time following the same clean trail....

Move on people, nothing to see here.....move along now...

Not this time....SD needs a deep cleaning, not just a bit of dusting on the surface.

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