

EVENT: MPact Conference (formerly known as RailVolution)
DATES: November 5-8, 2023
LOCATION: Phoenix, Arizona
ATTENDEE: Tyler Dos Santos-Tam, Councilmember, District 6

OVERVIEW

The Mpact Transit + Community Conference, formerly known as RailVolution, has organized a conference for nearly 30 years centered on shaping the vision for transit-oriented communities, in which people of all backgrounds and abilities can connect with each other and reach the places they need to thrive. MPact focuses on the idea that for any new mobility or development project, the people involved should see the project as a way to advance the kind of community they want to live in, and is a venue for sharing challenges and solutions. A delegation from Honolulu has attended this conference for many years. As the Chair of the Honolulu City Council's Transportation Committee, learning best practices and innovative ideas from other jurisdictions is of clear benefit.

Sunday, November 5

7:30AM - 2:00PM

Site Visit: Arcosanti: An Experimental Prototype Arcology

Introduction:

This was a site visit to Paolo Soleri's first prototype arcology, a fusion of architecture and ecology. In 1970, The Cosanti Foundation started building Arcosanti, an ambitious project envisioned as an experiment in living frugally and with a limited environmental footprint. They raised funds for the project by crafting and selling ceramic and bronze bells, a practice they still follow today. The tour covered the rich 50-year history of the project, helping attendees to understand why Arcosanti continues to influence architects, urban planners, and designers from around the world.

Discussion and Conclusions:

Arcosanti was founded as an experimental town on 25 acres of a 4,060-acre land preserve. It currently houses approximately 50 people, with thirteen major structures built on the site, some of which are several stories tall including the combined visitor center/gallery/cafe, and combined "live-work" structures. The site is intended to showcase innovative construction techniques, such as tilt-up concrete structures utilizing locally-sourced silt, and mindful environmental design, such as facing all buildings in such a way to maximize shade in the summer while maximizing sunlight in the winter.

While the project's ambitious goals may not have been entirely realized since its founding, Arcosanti provides an interesting model for how, for example, a "modern" Native Hawaiian village might be realized in Hawai'i, using indigenously-sourced materials, maximizing site-specific context, and also continually exploring how to center art and design on a unique urban site. Some drawbacks of the site include that its 1970s-era design hasn't been able to adapt to more modern technology such as clean energy improvements, and that it was not

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designed with ADA accessibility in mind. This is perhaps a cautionary tale that what may seem innovative at a particular moment may not always continue to be so, hence future adaptability must also be considered.

4:00PM - 6:00PM

Site Visit: Desert Botanical Garden

Introduction:

Councilmember Cordero and I did a site visit to Desert Botanical Garden, a 140-acre botanical garden located in Papago Park, which was founded by the Arizona Cactus and Native Flora Society in 1937. The garden is privately operated, unlike Honolulu's, but does an excellent job of showcasing native flora and fauna, and centering Arizona's native and Latino cultural roots.

Conclusions

The Desert Botanical Garden features several pavillions which are used for art galleries, community spaces, and welcomes concessionaires. The garden also features recreations of native Arizonan houses and village sites, to inform visitors about the culture of the Akimel O'odham and Apache people.

On the day we visited, the Garden was doing a "Dia de los Muertos" event, which had well over a thousand attendees when we attended - which suggests that throughout the day there were a few thousand to several thousand visitors total. There were Mexican musical groups, cultural arts/crafts/culture tables, as well as food trucks and kiosks.

All of the above contributed to making the space much more active, versus Honolulu's Botanical Gardens which are generally passive, open spaces. I would argue that we do an equally excellent job of showcasing our native (and other tropical) flora, although perhaps in a less intentionally curated way. There may be some benefits to allowing limited concessionaire activities within our Botanical Gardens as well as being much more intentional about programming events to attract visitors and spark interest from locals and tourists alike.

Monday, November 6

Panel Discussions

10:00AM - 11:30AM

Panel: Form or Finance: Making the Missing Middle Work

Introduction:

The description of this panel was: "The term "missing middle" describes housing types that have been excluded from many zoning codes. Advocates and planners blame such restrictive zoning for a lack of diverse housing – and for contributing to our national housing crisis. They call for

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zoning reform to remove restrictive, monotype districts and increase housing supply. Together, let's explore the role zoning can play in mitigating the shortage of housing, particularly affordable and workforce. We'll discuss the tools developers and planners need to create diverse housing options for a wide range of residents. What will be the next evolution of housing policy and the next step toward addressing the housing crisis? Let's bring what's out of the zone into the conversation!"

About the Speakers:

- Moderator: Cameran Bailey, Director of Development, Resilient Community Development Strategist, NEOO Partners, Inc., St. Paul, MN
- Karen Parolek, President, Opticos Design, Inc., Berkeley, CA
- Ryan Spak, Principal/Founder, Spak Group, Philadelphia, PA
- Danielle Arigoni, Managing Director for Policy and Solutions, National Housing Trust, Washington, DC

Core Content:

- Philadelphia: Case study on 5050 Baltimore Avenue in Cedar Park.
 - This development consists of 12 apartments (ten 1-BR, two 2-BR) and two commercial storefronts totaling 14,000sqft. Seven zoning variances were required for this relatively small project.
 - Notably, the deed restriction for affordability was tied to their financing, which means it can end once the financing ends. This is in contrast to Honolulu, where we select an arbitrary period (10 years, 15 years, 30 years, etc).
 - No public subsidy was required. This is in contrast to a project done by a nonprofit community development corporation that built 20 units in West Philadelphia on City land, using tax credits and city government monies and state funds, etc.
 - This resulted in 20 units for \$7 million, deed restricted as affordable housing for artists. This comes out to \$350K/unit, with free City land. This shows that government participation is not necessarily a silver bullet.
 - A critical point: in the current economic environment, a developer sitting on cash could earn 3.9% interest, versus putting funds at risk for, say, an 8% return, and locking up those funds for upwards of five years or more. The risk is not worth it in that case.
- Minnesota: Case study on zoning changes.
 - Minnesota relaxed its zoning to allow quadplex development on single family lots. However, capital remains the issue, especially to get to 100%AMI affordability or below.
 - Simply relaxing the zoning did not result in better affordability per se.
 - The quadplex "solution" also introduced other issues, including that the projects changed from being covered by IRC (two units and below) to IBC. This required

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a contractor who was “big” enough to do an IBC project but small enough to be competitive. This resulted in higher per sqft construction costs, which was a surprise.

- Pasadena: City incentives are being provided for ADUs, such as property tax waivers, and a requirement that it be rented to Section 8 voucher holders.

Conclusions:

The panelists reinforced some issues that we’re already dealing with in Honolulu: projects that don’t pencil out, deed restrictions that complicate financing, and the dramatic per-unit cost of government-funded projects.

I was also somewhat surprised that many of the panelists were focusing on what I would consider very small projects - for example, 12 units. This reinforces my belief that we need to change our A-1 and A-2 zoning, where these types of projects would be built.

The Minneapolis discussion with regard to quadplex zoning was particularly interesting, because it shows that this is not a panacea (and frankly, the difficulties we face in building two units under our existing ADU/Ohana zoning suggests that there may be very few willing buyers when it comes to four units). It also suggests that the advocates for quadplex zoning will also need to address the economics of this proposal, versus putting their energy into smaller apartments such as what Philadelphia did.

1:30PM - 3:00PM

Panel: Supercharging Your Bus Network

Introduction:

The description of this panel was: “Buses are the workhorses of most public transit systems and the COVID-19 pandemic cemented the critical importance of bus-based mobility in our communities. Programs to tackle chronic bus delay are delivering more reliable service, centering investment in equity-priority communities and delivering big benefits with small capital budgets. Learn the details from the US and Canada: How to use common transit agency data to dynamically illuminate the location, time and impacts of bus delay. How to select and implement bus priority treatments. How to communicate benefits and trade-offs in order to build support with staff and leadership. It’s all part of supercharging your bus network!”

This panel was interesting to me given the relatively heavy bus ridership on Oahu, and the plans to modify our bus routes to better align with Skyline. Within my district, there are often bus delays due to bus bunching, traffic along the main corridors (which is planned to be alleviated in some ways through the bus-only lane on King St as well as rerouting at least one line off of the King-Kapiolani corridor), and there are also communities which will be losing bus service (e.g. Upper Nu’uanu) and some which will be gaining service (e.g. Chinatown-Kuakini).

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About the Speakers:

- Moderator: Jonathan Mostiero, Associate Principal Planner, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, Inc., Denver, CO
- Stephen Newhouse, Manager, Bus Speed and Reliability, TransLink, Vancouver, BC
- Phoebe Fooks, City Planner – Transit, Department of Transportation, City and County of Denver, Denver, CO
- Andrew McFarland, Transit Priority Project Manager, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), Boston, MA

Core Content:

- Buses can and have been more responsive to changes in ridership patterns in the post-COVID era, and well-planned changes can make a major difference for ridership, rider experience, schedule adherence, and cost.
- MBTA/Boston ([link to reports](#)) has significantly expanded their bus lanes, going from less than 3 miles in Boston alone to 45 miles in 12 municipalities within the metro area.
 - On a single bus lane, they've achieved 3-4 minutes/trip savings, with 74% of riders experiencing a faster trip.
 - Like Honolulu, they have many relatively narrow streets (less than 40') and need to figure out how best to deploy buses effectively to serve these areas.
 - MBTA launched a "Bus Priority Toolkit" to assess and implement bus priority projects.
 - They have also implemented innovative strategies, including part-time bus lanes (which during other times are parking/bike lane exclusive).
- Denver ([link to reports](#)) underwent a process utilizing extensive data analysis to identify "problem areas," including those with high delays or low reliability, and then used a computer program to estimate the impact of various treatments.
 - Denver has implemented novel interventions such as dedicated right-turn lane pockets so buses don't have to queue behind vehicles trying to make right turns.
 - Denver has tried "transit signal priority" without a dedicated bus lane, but it hasn't proven to be particularly effective, as a lesson learned.
- Vancouver ([link to reports](#)) has measured the impact of bus delays, which has helped them to justify various interventions and investments.
 - Across the Vancouver area, they have spent \$155M since 2014 to just maintain service frequencies as congestion has made buses slower.
 - Their RapidBus rollout has resulted in 20% faster times for the first three routes.
 - Vancouver also embarked on an "operator survey" to ask bus drivers about what traffic signal, lane design improvements, etc. they would like to see, as the transit agency leadership recognizes that bus operators often know their routes the best. This was reaffirmed by the speaker from Boston as well, who also

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encouraged bus operators to support proposed improvements in public forums to combat negative comments from drivers.

Conclusion:

- Denver has done some interesting streetscape improvements, some of which are applicable, but many of their major corridors are wider than Honolulu's streets. Nevertheless, some of their interventions such as the dedicated right-turn lane pocket may be useful for intersections such as King and Punchbowl, and as the King Street bus lane expands, at other intersections through town. It was also interesting to hear that transit signal priority hasn't made a big difference, as I often hear from people in Honolulu who think that traffic light timing will be a universal cure.
- In all cases, the data driven approach must also be balanced by a need to make sure that all neighborhoods are served. The data may suggest that a route serving a neighborhood with low ridership may be suboptimal and could be better used elsewhere. This is an issue that we are dealing with in, for example, Upper Nu'uauu.
- I also greatly appreciated Vancouver's commitment to engaging their bus operators in identifying problems and proposing solutions.

3:30PM - 5:00PM

Panel: TOD Dollars and Sense for Today's Market

Introduction:

The description of this panel was: "While there are federal infrastructure dollars for building transit, developing around transit faces headwinds in today's economic climate. Let's dig into the factors making it difficult to realize the potential for economic development around transit, especially in the neighborhoods that most need it. To make development happen at all usually takes both public and private participation. To figure out whether it's realistic to expect new development requires taking an updated look at the economics and understanding the size of the "financial gap" between costs and revenues of projects. The availability and cost of land around transit also is critical to the financial feasibility of projects. Together, we'll explore specific cases where public agencies leveraged tools such as partnerships, land banking and innovative design and project management to reduce costs, find land and help bridge financial gaps."

About the Speakers:

- Moderator: Ryan Wheaton, Executive Director of Planning and Community Development, Pierce Transit, Puyallup, WA
- Charles Warren, PhD, Vice President, TOD Financial Analysis and Value Capture, WSP USA, Washington, DC
- Ian Washbrook, Principal, Entuitive, Calgary, Alberta

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- Patrick McLaughlin, Senior Development Project Manager, Oregon Metro, Portland, OR
- Veronica P. McBeth, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Transportation Policy, Office of the Secretary, US Department of Transportation, Washington DC

Core Content:

- Current economic environment is extremely difficult:
 - To borrow \$18M to build a 40-unit building, the monthly debt service at a 3% interest rate is \$93,000/mo, or \$2,325/mo/unit. At a 7% interest rate, the monthly debt service is \$146,000/mo, or \$3,650/mo/unit.
- Pierce Transit's recommended incentives: Lower parking requirements; broader zoning codes and easier compliance; faster approval of TOD-style projects; slower approval of non-TOD projects; tax breaks; donation of land; land banking; and lining up of institutional tenants.
- Calgary, Canada has built creatively-designed institutional uses around their Light Rail Transit line:
 - The Calgary Central Library, which to connect both sides of their rail line; the rail line runs through the building via a tunnel.
 - The Platform Innovation Centre & Parkade is a parking structure that is designed for adaptability, so that as parking needs go down in the future, the structure can be reutilized for other uses.
- Portland, Oregon has been undertaking a land banking effort, but there are challenges of balancing a community "wish list" for a site vs. what is economically feasible vs. what is physically feasible for the site (all three may not actually align).
 - They went out for an RFQ prioritizing housing affordability and community uses for some of the sites.
 - For some TOD-focused projects, they acquired sites in advance and found interim uses (in the case of Glisan Landing, it was an African American Youth Organization).
 - A critical point: for affordable housing, "free" public land may not be enough anymore.
 - That said, there are benefits to public landbanking, including: deeper subsidy for projects; a cash payer can create discounts; projects better align with policy goals; it can be an anti-displacement tool; it allows less-capitalized participants; and public ownership can reduce holding costs and also ease brownfield redevelopment.
 - On the flip side: reducing holding costs for the private sector means shifting the holding costs to the public sector; agencies need to be able to do property management; risk isn't entirely eliminated; and interim uses can prove tricky to manage.
- USDOT has been encouraging TOD developments to incorporate a broad definition of equity into their planning. They have also made federal funding available, such as:

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- Pilot Program for TOD Planning (Summer 2024)
- Innovative Finance and Asset Concession Grant Program (Fall 2023)
 - This was part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. A NOFO is expected soon.
- Transportation Infrastructure Finance & Innovation Act (TIFIA)
- Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing (RRIF)
 - This may not be applicable to HART per se.

Conclusion:

In this economic environment, borrowing costs are a critical impediment to TOD development (and development in general). Therefore, the City and County of Honolulu ought to consider programs which will specifically reduce borrowing costs; for example, expanding the existing Bill 1 grant program to introduce an alternative zero-interest forgivable loan pathway (as an alternative, not to replace the existing grant program), which will reduce the overall amount a Bill 7 developer needs to borrow to deliver the project.

Portland's lessons also suggest to me that the Council needs to work more closely with DLM to reexamine ROH Chapter 38 rules around land administration so that we can better manage interim uses, manage properties, and change our solicitation process to allow for more diverse participants.

We also need to be insistent on applying for every available federal dollar, and I appreciate the leadership of Vice Chair Kia'āina in this regard.

Tuesday, November 7

Panel Discussions

10:00AM - 11:30AM

Panel: Humanizing Highways

Introduction:

The description of this panel was: "State routes often are the conduit to major economic centers and other destinations that transit riders need. Yet, they also often present significant barriers to safe, appealing, accessible transit, let-alone transit-oriented development. State and federal DOT design standards deserve much of the blame, but transit agency policies and local government codes also can reinforce the car-centric nature of these routes. So, how do we adapt? Join an idea exchange about how to overcome barriers — political, interpersonal and physical — to transit on state routes, and why it matters. Find out about efforts to shift state DOTs from auto-focused road-builders toward a more expanded definition of mobility. Hear about efforts to collaborate across agencies, to listen and make changes to planning, design

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and implementation. Yes, it is possible to make state routes better for transit and for people walking and bicycling.”

About the Speakers:

- Moderator: Darby Watson, AICP, ASLA, Senior Vice President, Parametrix, Seattle, WA
- Philip Harris, AICP, Transit Integration Planner – Management of Mobility Division, Department of Transportation, State of Washington, Seattle, WA
- Alex Krieg, Director, Access, Integration and Station Area Planning, Sound Transit, Seattle, WA
- Amy Cummings, AICP, Statewide Transportation Planning Manager, Parametrix, Las Vegas, NV
- Fred Young, Active Transportation Specialist, Parametrix, Seattle, WA

Core Content:

- Seattle/SoundTransit: Multiple jurisdictions and land use policies have complicated efforts to resolve difficult crossings, some of which date back to 1936.
 - They have also had a history of (over)building private parking and public park-and-rides near transit stations, which has not been welcoming.
 - Attendees’ questions tended toward how reducing park-and-ride availability impacts ridership.
- Phoenix: Comparisons between jurisdictions, e.g. Seattle vs. Phoenix.
 - These cities have different standards when it comes to implementing complete streets/multimodal projects on legacy highways. What is allowed (and works for Phoenix) would not be recommended for Seattle.
 - Better outcomes only happen if planning starts early and involves all of the agencies and community members.
 - Phoenix has been aggressive about quick builds to convert old arterials.
- Nevada
 - There are lots of ambitious plans to address the seven-lane arterials that run through the City. Community support begins with visioning so people can see what a much better layout would be like.
 - Las Vegas also was intentional about planting trees for shade and to reduce heat.
 - Reno converted a large arterial into a bus rapid transit corridor. There was community support for wider sidewalks, but challenges with medians because of business access.

Conclusions:

While we don’t have as many large highways as other cities, we do have wide corridors such as Vineyard Blvd, Dillingham Blvd, and Nimitz Hwy in town, and Kamehameha Hwy, Farrington Hwy, Fort Weaver Rd, and Kualaka’i Pkwy in other neighborhoods, all of which are barriers to

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cohesive communities. Through our TOD plans, we have an opportunity to address some of these challenges, especially as we try to revitalize the waterfront along Honolulu Harbor in my district, for example, or activate the *makai* parcels in Aiea and Waipahu. Another area that poses unique potential is the divided stretch of Nimitz Hwy that goes through Iwilei, where there are large(ish) parcels in between: some of them are used, some are empty.

A theme which came up was the need to engage with other agencies which have jurisdiction; thankfully in our case it's generally only HDOT Highways and perhaps HDOT Harbors.

One note is that innovative solutions may run into MUTCD compliance issues. A suggested remedy is to call proposals "pilots" to gather information and data and measure effectiveness, which would allow certain proposals to be implemented under MUTCD.

3:30PM - 5:00PM

Panel: Microtransit: Transit Savior or Political Stopgap?

Introduction:

The description of this panel was: "While micro-transit is a new tool for some transit agencies, many have been using it for decades. Learn about the role of microtransit in the agency's suite of services – and what makes it work well or fail. How does microtransit work as a first-last mile connector to fixed-route transit? What are trade-offs of implementing micro-transit versus fixed-route transit, in terms of cost, convenience and capacity? How does micro-transit fit into the service equity and Title VI conversation? Get answers to these questions and your own, with examples and context from cities and suburbs."

About the Speakers:

- Moderator: Aaron Xaevier, Planner III, Valley Metro, Phoenix, AZ
- Charlie Stanfield, AICP, Planning Project Manager, Regional Transportation District (RTD), Denver, CO
- China Thomas, Director, Transit Capital Projects, Gwinnett County, Georgia, Lawrenceville, GA
- Jing Xu, Assistant Vice President, Service Planning and Scheduling, Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), Dallas, TX

Core Content:

- Gwinnett County Microtransit has rolled out two microtransit zones, which have proven to be very popular. \$3/trip using cut-away vehicles holding 12 customers, 6:00AM-8:00PM. RideGwinnett app is managed by RideCo software.
 - Lessons learned: Market early and often; understand audience and provide alternative booking methods; introduce the new model of service to operators; and establishing the age/target demo of the customers.

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- More lessons: Dedication between curb-to-curb and virtual stops; navigating county infrastructure; managing entry/exit in subdivisions; ensuring app accuracy.
- Aggressive plans: covering 100% of country by 2023.
- DART GoLink has 30 microtransit zones, and 360+ sq mi of coverage. Has a partnership with Uber: 51.7% of trips are via Uber. Nearly 4,000 riders/weekday, and nearly 100,000 monthly riders. Averages 11 minute waiting time, 2.83mi trip distance, and \$14.70 subsidy/rider.
 - Majority of GoLink zones are designed for areas that traditional fixed route services did not work well: low density, low demand, or restricted roadway geometry.
 - A few GoLink zones are overlaid within areas covered by a robust fixed route network. In South Dallas, this has helped to address equity, access to food within a food desert, 30% of riders continued to other parts of the DART system.
 - GoLink average waiting time: 11.3min compared to Uber: 10.1min, Dedicated Ride: 12.5min, and Low-Performing Bus: 15-30min.
 - GoLink has been more cost-effective: \$14.70 compared to Uber: \$9.30, Dedicated: \$20.40, Low Performing Bus: \$35.40.
 - Similar lessons and advice as Gwinnett County.
- Denver was a pioneer with its Call-n-Ride program. Now called FlexRide. 24 FlexRide service areas, 2-3 boardings per revenue hour (the presenter called this “mediocre”). Service hours are M-F, 5:30AM-7:00PM. They offer both a point-to-point service, and also a jitney-like service along a fixed route.
 - Denver noted that microtransit does shift investment from ridership-focused service, and the subsidy may be higher than the subsidy for traditional fixed routes. On the other hand, for lower ridership routes, the subsidy can be lower.
 - Denver also cautioned that microtransit can be a victim of its own success and management of expectations.

Conclusions:

Micromobility can help to solve last mile issues for O’ahu, but more critically, can assist in neighborhoods where a fixed route service doesn’t make sense. In my district, the Upper Nu’uanu area which recently lost Route 121 service, the inner Nu’uanu Valley neighborhoods that never had bus service, or Wilson Tract or Nihi St in Kalihi which doesn’t currently have transit service. This could also potentially replace the low-ridership “ridge” routes such as Route #10 or Route #123 that only run infrequently, thus saving riders time. This could also serve awkward areas such as Sand Island or Lagoon Drive, and also could help with military base access. I would like DTS to evaluate options for microtransit for hard-to-service areas.

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City Council
City and County of Honolulu

CLAIM FOR TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

Date: 11/16/2023

Traveler: TYLER DOS SANTOS-TAM

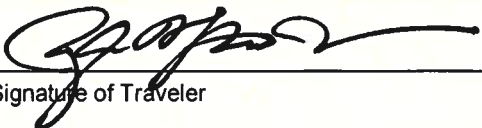
Event: ~~2023~~ M pact Transit + Community (formerly Rail-Volution) *Conference*

Location: Phoenix, Arizona

Dates: From November ~~7~~ ⁵ 2023 To November 8, 2023

Description	Amount	Notes:
1. Registration Fee	\$725.00	
2. Airfare	\$361.53	
3. Hotel	\$1120.20	
4. Meals		
5. Ground Transportation	\$375.91	
6. Tips		
7. Other		
Other		
Other		
8. Adjustment		
TOTAL REIMBURSEMENT	2244.64	

This is to certify that the above data, based upon receipts submitted to Council Administrative Support Services via a CCLTRVL02 form, is accurate. Further, I am claiming reimbursement for expenses associated with a trip in which City business was conducted and personal funds were used to advance payment:



Signature of Traveler

11.16.23

Date