

Palm Springs Local Election Issues

(Twenty-six reasons to Not vote for an Incumbent)

September 1, 2015

Local elections represent one of the few opportunities to meet and listen to candidates seeking votes from residents to return or put them in office. It's a perfect time for candidates to share their views and promises with respect to specific city issues. This Election Issues report is intended as a partial list of suggested topics appropriate as background material for questions some may wish to ask of candidates.

GOVERNMENT & POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Crime and City Jail - The city jail has been closed since the recession in order to save money. The local police force appears to have insufficient numbers to adequately address local crime. According to published sources Palm Springs crime rates are significantly greater than national averages. Should there be a cost/benefit analysis in concert with the police department to determine whether to reopen the jail and address police department needs?

Note: See online crime statistic reports at <http://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Palm-Springs-California.html> and <http://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ca/palm-springs/crime/>

Taxes on Individuals - Significant tax increases have been imposed during the past half-dozen years. These included the 2009 Measure G 4.5% Cell and Cable phone tax; the 2011 Measure J 1% sales tax; the 2014 Medicinal Marijuana 10% sales tax; and the 2012 Wastewater sewer service tax that's being increased yearly starting with 20% in 2013 up to 80% in 2016, and then in 10% increments from 2017 to 2031. Is it time to review these taxes for possible repeal? Should candidates be asked to sign a "No New Taxes Pledge"?

Note: See Sewer Tax table at <http://www.ci.palm-springs.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=25549> - the "hidden" sewer tax is billed annually on property tax statements.

City Official Ethical Standards - City council members do not uniformly subscribe to "perception as cause for avoidance" with respect to ethics. Some see ethics in government as a moral standard; others consider it little more than a set of defined legal and judicial requirements. Should moral standards of public trust receive consideration so that both the INTENT and the LETTER of the law are observed?

Council Sub-Committees - Policies and practices related to creation of two-member city council sub-committees do not provide they be chaired by disinterested council members and all meetings are not widely publicized. Should all meetings be adequately publicized and those covering controversial issues be chaired by disinterested council members?

Candidate Filing Requirements - Councilmembers Ginny Foat and Chris Mills sponsored the 2011 ordinance that significantly increased filing costs and required number of registered voter signatures needed in order to qualify as candidate for local elective office. One "benefit" was to decrease the number of low income candidates seeking election to office. Should there be alternatives, such as the collection of extra signatures, accepted in lieu of paying the high filing fees?

Councilmember Constituent Access - Some councilmembers are perceived as operating under "open door - closed mind" policies with respect to residents who hold views differing from their own. And in 2012 when over a hundred were encourage to apply for Measure J commission appointments, the council declined to meet or interview more than half of those who had applied. Are there standards of common courtesy that council members should exhibit with respect to Constituent requests for an audience or interview?

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City Council Representation - Should the number of council members be increased and their election be by district? One suggested format would consist of FOUR districts, representing four quadrants of the city, with two at-large. The result would be six council members and a mayor, for a total of SEVEN. This would appear to address the goal of fair representation for all parts of the city, including the far North and South sections.

LGBT Minority Political & Government Dominance - LGBT residents do not comprise a majority of the city's population but they appear more organized and effectively dominate local political and governmental activities. Their sometimes "tin ear" policy result has led to strong support for LGBT same-sex marriage and equal rights issues but SCOTUS striking down the heart of the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965 received no official local recognition. Should there be guidelines for when it may or may not be appropriate for the city council to adopt resolutions or otherwise express official support for political and social issues not directly related to the duties of their office?

Term Limits - There are no term limits for local elective office. (One candidate has served continuously for almost 12 years and seeks to serve an additional 4 years.) Almost every Palm Springs board and commission has a seven year term limit. Should there also be term limits for council members and the mayor?

TRIBAL RELATIONS

Government-Tribe Partnership - Relations between the city government and the Agua Caliente Tribe are viewed by some as deteriorating. There have reportedly been only nine joint meetings of the City and Tribal Councils in the past five years. Should steps be taken to strengthen the relationship?

Vacant Tribal Land Sections - Pleasant/Unightly Appearance maintenance issues associated with areas such as the abandoned Magruder building on tribal land lead to nearby residential resentment. Would improved relations between the city and the Tribe, with more mutual respect and consideration, possibly result in better cooperation and closer attention to these types of issues?

BUSINESS COMMUNITY INTERESTS & TOURISM

Tourism - Tourism now occupies first place in the list of Palm Springs business and economic activities. While it is a leading source of revenue for business and local government, it too often serves as justification for activities and expenditures that otherwise would receive more searching scrutiny with respect to costs and benefits. One result is a perception that the Downtown Business Community receives the lion's share of Tourism benefits with little left to address the needs of residents, neighborhoods and small businesses. Should this perceived imbalance be an issue of concern to the mayor and city council and, if so, what steps should be considered to address the issue?

Museum Market Plaza - Local sales taxes together with city General Fund tax monies are being used to completely redevelop the renamed Desert Fashion Plaza. The costs, using taxpayer funds, are in the \$100 million range (grants to developer, bond interest costs, underground garage maintenance, new street construction & maintenance, new city park, etc.) with almost no return benefit accruing to

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taxpayer funded city coffers. Also, the city has reportedly agreed to payment of \$55 thousand in Kimpton Hotel TOT rebates to the developer's company. Should there be an audit and report of taxpayer dollars that have gone and will go into this project? Since costs for the Plaza area will increase over time should the city undertake a cost benefit analysis to determine exactly what, if any, beneficial monetary return exists with respect to the complete spectrum of taxpayer funding for the project?

Museum Market Plaza Underground Parking Garage - The arrangement now in place provides the developer retains legal ownership to the underground parking garage structure and the city owns the facility's AIR RIGHTS. The city is required to maintain the garage in good condition and that it forever be a free parking facility. The financing arrangements have become a tangled web of funding and ownership. Should the entire web of funding and ownership be untangled and brought to light?

Downtown Event Center Public Park - A recent arrangement with the Museum Market Plaza developer resulted in the city paying \$5.3 million for a block of land on which it plans to spend an estimated \$12.5 million to develop a downtown event center and city park. The space was originally intended for a new theater and later an open grass space available as a public square. Is it now turning into a gold plated albatross event space intended to benefit both the Kempton and the planned JC Marriott hotels?

Forever Marilyn - The brief time the "Forever Marilyn" sculpture was on display proved that it had tourist attraction potential. Plans are reportedly underway to purchase the sculpture and return it to Palm Springs for display in the new Downtown Event Center Park. Taxpayer funds have been mentioned as the expected payment source for all or a portion of the costs. Should PS Resorts, beneficiary of TOT tourism dollar rebates, pay any portion of the costs?

BUZZ Trolley - Originally conceived as a service for hotel guests, it has proved quite popular with residents living along its route. Some wish to see the trolley's route extended and the hours of service lengthened to accommodate closing-time patrons leaving local bars. Some neighborhoods appear concerned over frequent trolley traffic through their area until after midnight. Should neighborhood concerns be addressed? Should the costs, estimated at \$4 per rider, be paid from tourism dollars?

Motorcycle Weekend - Viewed as a tourism asset and, as such, it is subject to the whims of downtown business community leaders. This became apparent when local hotel honchos expressed concern this year's Motorcycle Weekend should be cancelled lest attendee disruptions lead to publicity proving negative to the "Palm Springs Brand". Should tourism leadership desires be the voice that's accommodated with respect to the appropriateness of special weekend events?

Developer Fees - Should the city continue to offer cash incentives to developers paid from taxpayer money?

TOT Rebates - The city rebates a portion of the Transit Occupancy Taxes (TOT) to local hotels through PS Resorts, their public representative organization. The rebates may be appropriate for new small hotels during their first years of operations. Should the rebates for both large and small hotels be continued?

Economic Benefits - Downtown development, significant promotional activities and special events are all touted as resulting from tourism and other business activities. What is seldom recognized is that the majority of the costs associated with increased economic benefits come from the investment of

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taxpayer funds. Taxes raised from residents may well be the secret ingredient that provides the claimed economic benefit successes. Should more of our tourism returns be used to fund streets, the library and maintenance of our public infrastructure?

NEIGHBORHOODS AND RESIDENTS

Homelessness - The local homeless population continues to be one in need of more from city officials than kind words. Various committees have come and gone and yet solutions to the ongoing problem continue to be missing. City resources continue to grow and yet the funding and other attention provided to addressing homelessness receive very little of the community's wealth and good fortune. Should a permanent strategy for tackling this situation be developed to replace ad hoc committees that treat the subject as a temporary problem?

Vacation Rentals - Those residing in close proximity continue to voice concerns over the conduct of renters and guests in residences that are used as short-term vacation rentals. Noise, late hours, trash and other concerns all appear on the list of concerns. Should legal steps, including ordinances and strict policing, be taken to identify and eliminate the sources of this problem?

Tahquitz Creek Golf Course - The renamed Palm Springs Municipal Golf Course continues to require financial support from the city in order to fund annual operations. There are three public golf courses in Palm Springs available for tourists and residents to use. Since golfing is a rather expensive recreational activity should the city's golf course property be considered for other uses if it's unable to generate revenues sufficient to meet its \$5.6 million annual budgetary maintenance needs?

Street Maintenance - There is reportedly an \$80 million backlog of street surfaces in need of maintenance. Monies currently being used for street repairs include \$4 million from Measure J funds, \$5 million in borrowed funds and \$1.4 million matching funds from the Tribe for Section 14. Should there be a citizen Public Works Commission to hear resident concerns about needed attention and improvements to the city's transportation routes, policies and maintenance practices?

CV Link - The CV Link proposed bicycle-pedestrian-electric motor vehicle roadway, approximately 52 miles in length, would be constructed on or closely paralleling the Whitewater River wash embankment (54% on the river embankment - the remainder on city streets). It's being funded through a combination of grants together with \$20 million from Measure A sales tax bridge-highway-street funds money. Future maintenance costs are to be paid from individual valley city taxpayer funds. There are no independent studies justifying the project such as total costs and funding sources, existing and future usage data, and claimed benefits. Each of these statistical studies has yet to be obtained and made available for public review. The total estimated cost of the CV Link roadway is reportedly \$100 million dollars. Should the CV Link roadway plan be submitted to Palm Springs voters for their rejection or approval?

There are many other topics of concern and interest that are equally important to Palm Springs residents. Among the list not included here are vehicle speed limits, water usage restrictions relative to approval of new building projects, family friendly concerns, lengthy business permit delays, waiver of

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parking space requirements for favored major projects, new Aluminaire House maintenance plans, city policies for treatment of historic buildings, building height limit waivers, a citizens Finance Commission, proposals for mayoral runoff elections, and suspending city council and other official meetings during the month of August.

The intent of this report is to provide topical background information as support for a question that may be seen as worthy for asking a candidate's views or position on the matter.

Please alert me to factually incorrect information that is found to exist in this report and, of course, thanks in advance for that support.

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