

The Ideal City Council Candidate

July 5, 2015

Summary:

The current Palm Springs political season has four positions on the city council up for election and only one incumbent seeking reelection. That number of open positions is a rare occurrence. At least eight candidates took notice and all began their campaigns in advance of the official filing date.

Now that we have candidates, voters need to see meaningful issues presented for discussion and learn the positions of individual candidates to them.

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In the City of Palm Springs the ideal mayoral or city council candidate would be one who held out the promise of change. It would be change of the type that would personally impact individual voters and ultimately improve their financial well-being and/or quality of life. That campaign platform would provide residents a reason to show interest in the elections and its outcome.

The ideal candidate would not shirk from promoting decreased taxation, steps towards more equal representation, and better opportunities for citizen input to government affairs. The following are examples of steps to attract community interest and start a conversation about the change each would represent.

1. Support a measure providing for election of city council members by district. The goal would be to provide some diversity in the composition of the city council. Women, the financial middle class and neighborhoods would benefit.
2. Examine the Measure J Sales tax implementation. The Measure J 1% Sales Tax proceeds include a majority component intended for the betterment of the community. Over \$43 million is already being diverted for the benefit of tourism and downtown interests. Additional diversion of funds should not be allowed to continue.
3. Repeal of special ongoing taxes including elimination of the Utility tax and the Cell Phone tax (both are around 5%). Palm Springs taxes are being used to support a city government structure that is considered by some to be extravagant.
4. The city currently provides cash subsidies from taxpayer funds to assist new developments and businesses. The practice should be eliminated.
5. Eliminate the city subsidy for the Tahquitz Creek Resort golf course. If the golf course (aka Palm Springs Municipal Golf Course) can't pay its way something else should be done with the property. Subsidizing it amounts to little more than a boondoggle.
6. Create a citizen Finance Commission to review budget & finances. Perhaps the most important annual city ordinance is the one creating the budget. There is no decent mechanism for citizen input and review. It's entirely a staff and city council activity.
7. Create a citizen Public Works & Transportation Commission. Transportation, including

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motor vehicles, bicycles and pedestrian issues are implemented by staff without provision for significant residential input. Whether it's new bridges, streets and highways, or bicycle and walking paths, there are few opportunities for residents to provide input to an independent commission regarding their concerns with respect to these infrastructure and maintenance activities.

8. Add more street signal lights to slow vehicle speed limits. Vehicle speed limits must be set by a formula relating to how fast traffic is currently moving. The only way to slow fast moving traffic is to decrease the distance between stop signs and signals. Increasing the number of signals, set for slower traffic flows, would serve to decrease our high traffic speeds on major thoroughfares.

9. Increase city support for homeless issues. The City of Palm Springs provides more support for seniors, tourism, golfing, bicycling, developers, the animal shelter or practically anything other than support for those who are homeless. Throwing money at the issue may not be the solution but more emphasis on seeking actual solutions must be taken. Creating a citizens Homelessness Commission would be a first step in the quest for answers.

10. A past budget included a provision to close City Hall on Friday and change the employee workweek to a four-day activity. There's no longer a budget crunch and the reasons for closing City Hall are no longer compelling. Opening City Hall on a five-day basis should be a requirement.

11. Negotiate arrangements with the Tribe for beautification of their vacant properties. There are many tribal sections that are vacant and unsightly. Some agreement should be sought that would facilitate improvement to the appearance of these areas.

12. The Springs and Gene Autry shopping areas represent a vibrant component of the Palm Springs shopping community. However, they are shortchanged when it comes to support from the Tourism honchos and other downtown interests. One step to recognize their importance and facilitate resident and tourist access would be to add them to the BUZZ trolley route.

13. More Palm Springs Police Department walking and bicycle patrols are needed. Support for adding four or more patrol positions to the department's budget should be a high priority.

Unfortunately there's little need for any of the candidates currently running for office to step out in front and seriously consider these proposals. Too many of these suggestions represent issues that would step on sensitive toes. Strong opposition to cutting taxes, district elections and money for the homeless would certainly be heard. And, if no candidate raises issues, such as the ones listed, there's no reason for other candidates to open what could ultimately turn out to be a "can of worms".

Without significant campaign issues our current election season promises to be boring. It will at least share that status with previous elections. The last time Palm Springs had serious issues raised by candidates occurred in 2003 when the LGBT community campaigned against the incumbent mayor because of his position with respect to gay issues and the annual White Party.

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The ideal city council candidate probably doesn't exist here in Palm Springs. Most, if not all, probably don't qualify as populist candidates. Skewed views favoring business community interests over those of residents and neighborhoods tend to be the norm.

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