



ALERT

January 10, 2017

How do the members of the City Council spell "relief?"

J - i - m - T - h - o - m - p - s - o - n

Yesterday was the new city manager's first day on the job. Counting two "acting" city managers, Thompson is the seventh person to fill the role in the past nine years - and as one councilmember remarked shortly after the Council unanimously voted to hire Thompson: "We all breathed a huge sigh of relief."

It's little wonder -- because the city manager search process dragged on for the better part of the year. During that time, the Council received relentless criticism from citizens and even several of the candidates for conducting a screwed up selection process.

Following his hiring in November, Thompson began meeting with opinion leaders throughout the city in order to get the lay of the land. But his effort to get a head start by meeting with city employees was stifled by acting city Manager Brian Biesemeyer, who instructed department heads not to meet with Thompson until he was officially on the job.

Those meetings are now being scheduled.

Rest assured that Thompson has already gotten an earful about our city's sharp political divide - which he will experience for himself soon enough. For now, however, Thompson, the former City Manager of Casa Grande, should be preparing to confront some serious issues looming on the horizon.

The biggest threat to maintaining the ongoing resurgence of the downtown area isn't the Entertainment District or condos or apartments. And it's not some of the shopkeepers who refuse to keep up with consumers' current shopping trends. The biggest problem is parking, or the lack thereof ... morning, noon and night.

This is the kind of so-called problem many cities would love to have, because it would mean their downtowns were attracting people and generating an energy that's contagious. Not to mention an infusion of tax dollars to bolster their economies. As for Scottsdale, our downtown is turning into a thriving employment center and a mecca for new dining, drinking and entertainment experiences. And thanks to the nearly 4,000 people who now live downtown, the area is operating 24-7.

The city has yet to solve the downtown parking issue - even though the City Council is painfully aware of the problem that's about to be exacerbated by the kickoff of the "event season" this month. Postponing decisions about the parking problem downtown is no longer an option.

A similar issue is brewing in South Scottsdale where the commitment to revitalize this area is working, almost too well.

South of Osborn Road, the influx of new residents and businesses are challenging city services - especially those provided by public safety personnel. For example, Fire Station 601 near Miller and McDowell Roads has always been the city's second busiest station. Station 602, located on Indian School Road in the core of the city, has historically answered the most calls.

Station 601's fire and emergency calls are beginning to approach the level of Station 602's call volume three years ago before the City Council decided to add additional staffing to maintain services for the densely populated downtown area. This issue needs to begin being addressed before it becomes a problem in South Scottsdale.

And, finally ... there's the infrastructure issue, which is impacting the entire city.

As the MetLife Snoopy blimp hovers over TPC in three weeks, TV viewers across the country will be treated to panoramas of the Sonoran Desert, including the McDowell Mountains and Pinnacle Peak. The announcers for "The Greatest Show on Grass" will describe for those enduring freezing temperatures in Minnesota and Wisconsin how the mercury sticks in Scottsdale are topping 70 degrees under bright blue skies. For those of us who live here, the week-long presentation will feel like it was written, directed and produced by Experience Scottsdale.

What viewers won't see under the veneer and what a majority of voters refuse to admit is that our city's infrastructure is deteriorating at a rapid rate.

Sooner rather than later taxpayers are going to have to pay the piper.

Welcome to Scottsdale, City Manager Thompson.



BITE ME!

This week's best sound bite comes from Vice Mayor Kathy Littlefield when she reflected on 2016:

"The most important, long-lasting accomplishment this year (2016) was the hiring of the new city manager. Hopefully, he will bring some long-term vision, focus and stability to our city government."

ALERT ARCHIVES

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