

Subject: Upcoming Election Issues  
August 3, 2023

The period of July through August is an easy, laid-back time in Highlands. Residents and visitors are enjoying the wonderful cool summer temperatures, and the air is full of beautiful blooms blanketing the mountains. But, after Labor Day, not only will the tempo pick up as the fall colors change the landscape, the upcoming municipal elections will certainly bring its own 'airing' of the issues facing the candidates.

Let me outline some possible topics that I think might arise that will determine the future of the town. Voters will have the final say in how they want the town to be in the future.

One overarching issue will center around growth and development. That is, how much and what kind of growth do we want to see in Highlands? On one side, people tell me we must have to have an economy that enables people to make a living here on the plateau. I understand their concerns. On the other hand, some folks worry about over-development in the name of economic progress. Their fear is that rapid and expansive growth will undermine the quality of life that we all enjoy here in Highlands. The candidates for the board of commissioners will have to take a position.

Another issue will be whether to extend water and sewer services beyond the current town limits. The question is whether or not to transition these critical services into a regional system or not, and would that extension of services control development or promote development in areas where water and sewer are now not currently available?

I am sure parking for the downtown will be a topic. Does the town add more to the already existing 900 or so parking spaces? If we were to expand parking, where would that happen? The Highlands Comprehensive Plan calls for more parking from 3rd to 1st Street. A previous parking study had a plan for the project. The questions will be whether it should be done, what would be the impact on properties, and how would such a substantial project be funded.

Another issue will center around the room tax and how it is allocated. The method of use of the room tax is based on the 1985 legislative formula. The state has made changes in 1997 and 2011 that permit other uses of those funds, and these statutes need to be reviewed, especially in the robust tourist economy that the community now enjoys.

Road maintenance, sanitation, recycling, and garbage rates will also be on the table. Long-term infrastructure projects will also probably be addressed.

A big issue will center around housing. Of course, the candidates' positions on STRs will be a major topic of discussion. Questions such as does the town continue with the current September 15 ordinance or do we jettison STR restrictions will be on the table. Whether the town will exercise the STR amortization option for residential areas will also be on the table.

Workforce housing will be an issue. Should the town become involved in facilitating affordable housing in the town, or not? A resident recently shared with me an article about Vail, Colorado Vail, Colorado, just committed 50 million dollars to purchase 49 acres earmarked for affordable housing. Vail has a partnership with developers to build about 200 units for about 165 million dollars. Should Highlands embrace such partnership projects? How much in increased

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property taxes would residents be willing to pay for such a program, not to mention would the town have enough land in the first place? Housing could be a very big issue this fall.

I'm sure other issues will come forward as the election approaches. I will stand by and closely follow the discussion.

