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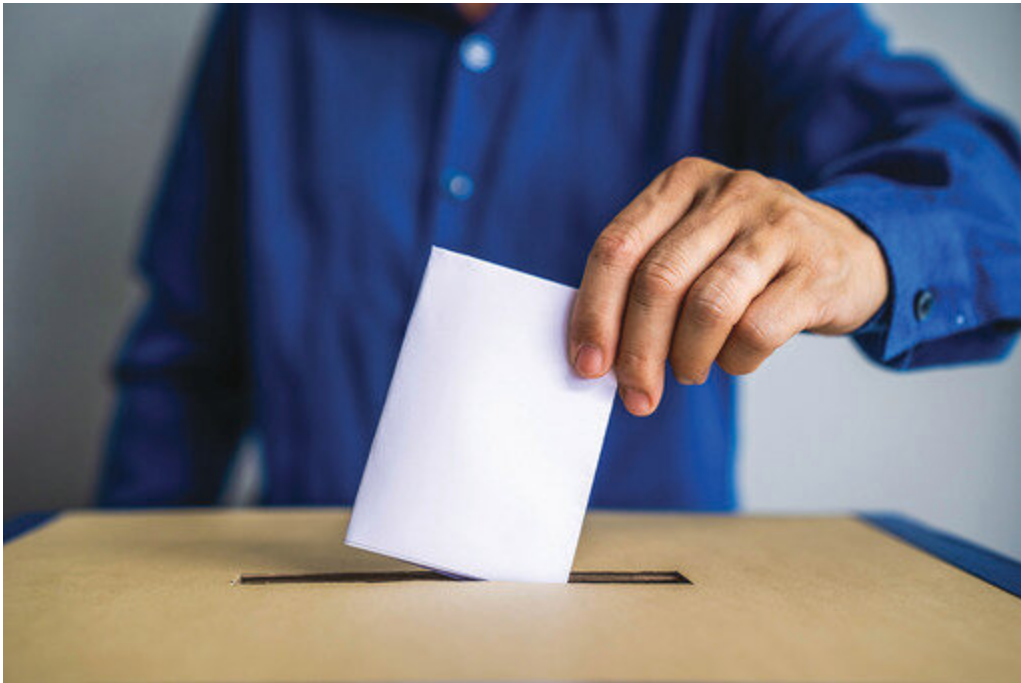


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ELECTION

Fountain Hills candidates take part in Q&A: Part one



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(Metro Creative)

Posted Thursday, May 30, 2024 10:07 am

The field has been set for the 2024 Fountain Hills Town Council race, with three candidates vying for the office of mayor and eight seeking one of three seats available on the council. All candidates were invited to take part in the Fountain Hills Times Independent's four-part Q&A series, with responses to the first question printed here.

Candidates for town council include Clayton Corey, Matthew Corrigan, Gayle Earle, Henry Male, Peggy McMahon, Art Tolis, Robert Wallace and Rick Watts. Candidates for mayor include Joe Arpaio, Ginny Dickey and Gerry Friedel.

Editor's note: A response from mayoral candidate Joe Arpaio was originally absent from this posting. The Times Independent has since learned the email address used to contact Arpaio was incorrect, an error on the part of the newspaper. With the matter resolved, Arpaio's response has been added to the story. The Times Independent apologizes for the error.

As a reminder, the voter registration deadline for the primary election is July 1. Early ballots are scheduled to be mailed July 3. July 19 is the last day to request an early ballot and July 23 is the final day to mail back early ballots. July 26 is the final day to vote early in person with July 30 being Election Day, with polls scheduled to close at 7 p.m.

Voters may visit BeBallotReady.vote to verify their registration status and to make sure their personal information is accurate. Additional election information can be found at elections.maricopa.gov.

Locally, the Fountain Hills Chamber of Commerce has scheduled a pair of candidate forums. The council forum will be Thursday, June 6, and the mayor forum will be Thursday, June 13. Both will run from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Community Center.

Question: With the town emphasis on pavement management do you support asking voters to approve a bond proposal to finance street improvements? What other options?

Joe Arpaio (mayor)

I am 100% opposed to any tax increase, including bonds, for street repairs and maintenance.

The \$60-plus million backlog has been caused by prior mayors and town councils avoiding prioritizing street repairs in prior budgets. Instead, taxpayer money that could and should have been directed to streets went to unnecessary discretionary capital projects, adding unnecessary town staff and overhead.

It's appalling, and I put the responsibility for this current crisis in the laps of my mayoral opponents, Mayor Dickey and Councilman Friedel, who ignored Councilman Skillicorn when he presented many options for moving existing tax dollars to streets during the last budget cycle.

As mayor, I will challenge staff to do more with less and prioritize streets. We don't need a tax increase. We need leadership that respects tax dollars.

Noted: When I was sheriff of Maricopa County for 24 years with a \$350 million annual budget, I gave back millions to the government and taxpayers each year, not to mention the additional millions saved by my volunteer posse and certain jail policies every year. I expect to do the same as mayor.

Clayton Corey (council)

I fully support asking voters to approve a bond proposal to finance street improvements. Our streets are crucial for daily commutes, public safety and the aesthetic appeal of Fountain Hills. The bond proposal would fund essential repairs and upgrades, ensuring our roads are safe and reliable, aligning with our commitment to modernizing infrastructure as outlined in our strategic and general plans. The Citizens Advisory Street Committee (CASC) has assessed our pavement conditions and recommends this bond proposal, highlighting the urgent need for action. Additionally, I back the CASC's "Fix All Now" proposal aiming to address major road issues comprehensively and swiftly.

However, we should also consider alternative funding options. Pursuing state and federal grants dedicated to infrastructure improvements can provide additional funding. Engaging with private entities through public-private partnerships can leverage resources and expertise. Allocating a

portion of the town's annual budget to pavement management ensures steady progress without large-scale borrowing. Implementing special assessment districts allows residents in impacted areas to contribute directly to the costs. By exploring alternatives, we can ensure a balanced approach to financing street improvements, maximizing efficiency and community benefits. Together, we can pave the way for a brighter future for Fountain Hills. #FountainHillsFuture ClaytonCorey.com.

Mathew Corrigan (council)

The question is this; should voters be asked to approve a bond proposal to finance street improvements? First, what is a no tax increase bond? Mike McShane, writer for Forbes magazine, in a 3/6/2019 article wrote, "so called 'No tax increase bonds', increase your taxes. How? Bonds finance capital improvements, like roads, streets and infrastructure. Taxpayers pay off those bonds over time, usually via an increase to their property taxes. Bonds are issued for a specific period, 10, 20 or 25 years; and when those bonds are paid off, taxpayer's tax bills go down. But that rarely happens because government officials go back to the taxpayers with another vote for another bond."

Infrastructure spending should be a priority for reserves over time, not a last minute emergency bond bail out.

So back to the first question posed, "...do you support asking voters to approve a bond proposal to finance street improvements? Answer: I prefer No bonds, only as a last resort from poor choices in priorities, planning and mayoral leadership in the past.

Now, "What other options?" The answer: Cut pet spending projects and instead fund infrastructure reserves. This should have been a major priority in the last six years.

Ginny Dickey (mayor)

The Road District disbanded in 1989; the Fire District was dissolved in 2001... both property taxes we longtime residents paid to build our now 50-year-old infrastructure.

Councils and citizen groups acted over the years to avoid the inevitable inability to finance public safety and streets with existing revenue sources. Four property tax efforts failed. A bond for Saguaro Boulevard succeeded, but for Palisades did not. Three councils increased sales taxes to partially bridge the gap.

In the meantime, consultant, staff and resident assessments provided guidelines to tackle the task. The goal is to reach a standard that can be reasonably maintained within an affordable annual budget. It's clear the sooner we achieve the standard, the faster we'll reach that

equilibrium.

Former council and I increased yearly allocations, plus dedicated nearly all CARES funding to streets, supported by current council. Discussion about recommendations to treat streets before they fail – while repairing those requiring attention – will include financing options.

We estimate needing an additional \$5M annually over five years starting in FY26. I support exploring various bonds. Cutting programs that make our community special, negatively affecting public safety, staffing levels or capital needs would have to be too deep to get there.

Gayle Earle (council)

I believe we need to exhaust all other options first.

Road repair is a top priority. In FY2024, there's \$7M in the Adopted Budget. The FY2025 budget includes \$7M Budgeted from Roads Fund from the American Rescue Plan Act, revenue from Highway Users Recovery Fund and Fountain Hills residents' Vehicle License Tax. This equates to 28% of the estimated \$50 million needed for ALL streets to be repaired.

Grant money might be an option as well as limiting spending on projects that should wait until the roads are repaired.

IRS limits the amount towns can spend per year for road repair. If council and staff manage expenditures wisely the roads might possibly be repaired in approximately 5-6 years.

I am a proponent of ensuring we are prudent with all expenditures to get the roads repaired in the next several years before asking residents to pay for the next 10-20 years on their property taxes.

I support asking voters for a bond only as a last resort when or if requested and desired by the residents.

Gerry Friedel (mayor)

Roads continue to be a priority for the town. Roadways are a critical infrastructure and key to our needs. I am in support of roadway improvements, and I would support a bond request for roadwork for the following reasons. First, we have put an emphasis on repairing our roads by putting millions of dollars into road repairs the last two years. We could not ask the residents to participate without showing them that we are working on the backlog of road repairs. Second, any bond request would be for a specific period of time and a specific project. The residents have made it clear that any request for additional funds, they want a "sunset" a finite end date, a bond for the roads is exactly that.

Perhaps a new strategy is needed as well. We could take one major road project each year such as Palomino or Kingstree and make it a capital improvement project (CIP) along with our current road budget. Prioritization of our capital projects would be done to meet other needs. With a roads backlog at approximately \$40 million, we need to find solutions that allow us to maintain the town's other infrastructure and still address roadwork.

Henry Male (council)

As a last resort, I would support asking voters to approve a bond proposal but only after we've exhausted all other options. So much will depend on what the size of immediate and short-term needs are: what must be done now or soon versus what can wait. The Public Works Department's evaluation is underway and will give us stronger footing to solve this ongoing issue.

Homeowners often find themselves utilizing their home equity to pay for important needs and improvements. It is often the best solution to a seriously pressing problem. Though not desirable, it sometimes is the only solution.

Currently the town is debt free. Let's strive to maintain that exemplary financial position. Fountain Hills would benefit financially from both selected residential and retail growth.

Ultimately, by attracting more sustainable businesses while helping those businesses promote the concept of "I buy FH" (with both current as well as new families), we can increase our sales tax revenue which would minimize the need to consider a bond proposal.

Peggy McMahon (council)

For over 20 years Fountain Hills has been my hometown, and I have enjoyed being active in my community as a volunteer, advisor and collaborator. In 2020, I was elected to Town Council where I have gained valuable experience and knowledge. I take pride in all of the positive accomplishments achieved as a council member. Listening to the concerns of residents and offering reasonable solutions is a priority.

The condition of our streets and their repair has been a top priority for me and our residents. To help address this complex issue, council created a Streets Committee that is made up of very experienced members. Their in-depth review and assessment of our streets concluded that \$50 million is needed to repair and maintain the backlog of our deteriorated streets. With an annual budget of \$3.9 million, clearly the town won't be able to cover that cost.

Fountain Hills needs funding to replace and maintain our aging infrastructure to ensure that our streets remain safe, functional and accessible for residents and visitors alike. Without a dedicated tax for street repairs, a bond may be needed to provide upfront capital and prevent

even more costly repairs down the road.

Art Tolis (council)

We should carefully consider whether to ask voters to support a bond for street financing. Based on staff recommendations, the costs associated with bonding and the long-term monetary impact on our community must be thoroughly evaluated.

Our diverse community includes many HOAs that manage their own streets, making it challenging to garner widespread support for a bond initiative that benefits all non-HOA streets. Residents in HOAs would be required to contribute to the bond program despite already funding their own street maintenance.

However, maintaining and upgrading our downtown, surrounding streets, and major arteries is crucial. These areas are the face of our community, influencing visitors' perceptions and potential investment decisions. Well-maintained streets can attract new residents and businesses, boosting our local economy and enhancing community pride.

We must weigh these benefits against the financial burden on all residents, ensuring a fair and transparent process. By clearly communicating the long-term advantages and addressing concerns about equity, we can build a case that highlights the shared value of well-maintained infrastructure for the entire community.

Robert Wallace (council)

I recognize the importance of maintaining our streets and infrastructure in Fountain Hills. While a bond proposal is one option to finance street improvements, we should explore other avenues before taking on additional debt. Options include reallocating the existing budget, engaging in public-private partnerships, pursuing grants and funding, and implementing community-based initiatives like "adopt-a-road" programs.

To make downtown Fountain Hills more vibrant and appealing, we can offer tax incentives to small businesses, invest in beautification projects, host regular events like farmers' markets and art fairs, simplify the permit and licensing processes and improve parking availability.

Addressing housing affordability and availability in Fountain Hills, we can implement smart zoning policies to allow diverse housing options, provide incentives for affordable housing in new developments, support first-time homebuyer programs and encourage senior living communities to meet the needs of our aging population.

Bridging political divides in Fountain Hills requires inclusive and transparent governance. We'll establish open communication channels, form community advisory boards, focus on common goals like public safety and quality education, commit to transparent decision-making and promote respectful dialogue. These measures will create a cohesive community where all voices are heard and valued.

Rick Watts (council)

It is clear that the town does not have the funds to complete repairs or replacement of all the roads currently identified as requiring either. It also appears that the roads are failing at a faster rate than can be repaired or replaced based on current funds including available state or federal grants. A properly noticed and widely advertised online survey (or similar inexpensive process) of the town residents is in order to determine whether we continue to contend with potholes and repairs vs a planned repair and replacement project, based on current technologies, must precede any bond or similar taxing initiative. But either way we should understand why our roads are failing and take steps to write specifications to prevent future premature failures through engineering specifications, understanding root causes, performance bonds that guarantee compliance with the engineers' specifications and an option for value engineering. Facts, based on the Streets Committee study, Road Assets services report and the town's current process and software solution should all be presented in summary manner to the residents in order to make an informed decision on next steps to address our roads problem. The residents should have a voice in any next steps.

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