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ELECTION

Fountain Hills council candidates address forum questions

Eight participate in Q&A



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(INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA/BOB BURNS)

Several council candidates greet one another following the forum questions.

Posted Monday, June 10, 2024 8:54 am



By Bob Burns (/browse.html?byline=Bob Burns)

Mail (<mailto:bburns@inius.org>)

Against a backdrop of political infighting at all levels of government, eight candidates for Fountain Hills Town Council were cordial and anything but discordant in answering questions posed to them in a forum Thursday, June 6.

The event was presented as a joint effort of the Chamber of Commerce and I Love Fountain Hills Civic Affairs and sponsored by Salt River Project.

Geoff Yazzetta, chair of the Civic Affairs arm of I Love Fountain Hills, presented the questions to candidates Clayton Corey, Mathew Corrigan, Gayle Earle, Henry Male, incumbent Councilwoman Peggy McMahon, Art Tolis, Robert Wallace and Rick Watts.

Five questions dealt with addressing a sustainable and stable population base for the community, public safety specific to the MCSO law enforcement contract, downtown/economic development, Fountain Lake and potential lake liner replacement/costs and why they chose to run for council.

There was general agreement by all the candidates regarding all the questions.

A population base in the range of current (roughly 24,000) up to 35,000 or so was considered appropriate.

McMahon said the current population is compatible with the town's natural boundaries. She said the town needs to look toward a new generation to support the schools and local businesses.

Watts suggested the town make a specific effort to find two or three developers willing to develop the State Trust Land. He said the town needs staff with the expertise to work with these development companies.

The candidates were unanimous in their support for the current team of MCSO deputies on the streets in Fountain Hills, but there was also agreement that the town needs to work harder on its agreement with the Sheriff's Office and monitor it more closely.

Male said there is no question the service is good and what the town has is working. However, he said there is opportunity to have better contract negotiations for the benefit of everyone. Earle and Wallace both said that while the community is safe, there needs to be a watchful eye toward the border so the town's record of safety can be maintained. Earle said she appreciates the good service being received, but the agreement needs to be monitored closely to assure the town is getting what it pays for.

It was mentioned by several that the town benefits from MCSO services such as aviation, tactical operations and special investigations unit that it does not pay additional.

The candidates as a whole were in support of efforts to improve the downtown experience for Fountain Hills residents and visitors. Corrigan suggested a more focused approach in reaching out to economic decision makers to interest them in development or operations in the downtown. He also suggested an overhaul of regulation might make it easier for those wanting to locate here.

Corey said Fountain Hills is known for its signature events that draw visitors. He suggested an effort to create new or expand existing events to multi-day ventures could bring visitors wanting to stay and enjoy the events. He also said he likes the town's new "Naturally Fountain Hills" branding slogan.

Candidates acknowledged that Fountain Lake and the iconic fountain are important to Fountain Hills and must be maintained. Replacing the liner is both an expensive and intensive project with a lot of complex elements to consider.

Tolis said the town should be working with the Fountain Hills Sanitary District, which has as much of a stake in the lake for water storage. He said the town should immediately involve the district in discussions and planning for the replacement project, saying it is necessary for everyone the fountain/lake be maintained.

Wallace said it is important the town get ahead of the financing to reduce the urgency when the time comes. The town has been budgeting for the project for a few years, although Watts suggested that savings should have started as soon as the liner was replaced 24 years ago.

The candidates arrived at their decision to run for the council for various reasons. They are presented here in the order in which they responded to the question at the forum.

Wallace said he is in a position where actively serving the community is an important role he wants to take on. He said he is objective and said he will serve the interests of the citizens.

Corrigan said he had no desire to run for council when he started attending meetings a couple of years ago. After, he was urged by others to run. He said there is a time to act and bring his talents to finding solutions.

Tolis is a former council member and said he has always had a passion for the community and wants to bring his talents and experience back to the council to help maintain a thriving community into the future.

Corey said the town needs multi-generational representation with its great people and wide diversity. He said he has talked one-on-one with many people and believes this is a great way to give back to the community.

McMahon said she has really enjoyed her service to the community and wants to continue. She believes Fountain Hills is on the cusp of positive change and there are many things left to be done to be a great, beautiful, viable town.

Male has lived here a number of years and says he now has the time to help and wants to offer a new, independent voice to the table. He said he has the ability to listen, learn and consider everyone's point of view.

Watts was looking to the future after he retired and determined he could make a difference, bringing his experience and expertise in a variety of areas to the Town Council. He said he is an objective listener and can help find middle ground on issues.

Earle said she became concerned about polarization in politics and began to realize it was happening at the local level as well as nationally. She said she wants to bring transparency and integrity to the leadership in the community.

The entire forum was recorded and will be available on the Chamber of Commerce YouTube channel. Visit fhchamber.com.

The Times Independent invites readers to submit their civil comments on this issue. Email AZOpinions@iniusa.org. Bob Burns can be reached at bburns@iniusa.org.

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Saturday,
June 29,
2024
Vol. 2 No. 365

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OPINION:
Commentary

Consumers deserve clear labeling on lab-grown meat; **6**

STATE:
News

AG offers opinion on what is medically needed abortion; **8**



TRAVEL:
Lifestyle

Will retirees choose a never ending cruise?; **12**



SPORTS:
Recreation

Millennium community cheers Holmes' big night; **14**

Reader services:
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Eight East Valley police departments create team to look at use of force

By J. Graber
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Eight East Valley police departments are joining forces to improve transparency in the investigative process when officers are involved in the use of force.

Apache Junction, Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa, Paradise Valley, Queen Creek, Scottsdale and Tempe police are combining to create the East Valley Critical Incident Response Team, which hits the ground July 1.

That means officers from other agencies will investigate the use of force when used by police from any given agency.

For instance, if a Scottsdale Police officer shoots a suspect, another officer from the police department can no

* See Police on page 13

Mesa Police Department Officer Steve Berry said the creation of a east valley critical incident response team formalizes what has already been happening much of the time when a police officer is used serious force. (Independent Newsmedia/J. Graber)

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