

Opinion

Hometown

A letter from:
Al Lorenz

One fall afternoon in 1994, I was being transferred to Arizona by Motorola. I flew to Phoenix from Minneapolis and started to look for a new location to call "home" for my family. That fall afternoon I drove east from Scottsdale on a narrow Shea Boulevard, arriving at the intersection of Palisades and Shea.

I will never forget the view of the Mazatzal Mountains, Four Peaks, the Goldfield Mountains and this picturesque town nestled below in the Verde River Valley. Yes, it was Fountain Hills and, at that time, marketed as a "Hometown by nature" by the Chamber of Commerce.

Why do I tell this story now in 2018? Because I still drive through that intersection and feel that same way after over 23 years of calling Fountain Hills home and volunteering with many others to help build our parks, build a United Methodist Church, coach youth sports, support the Boys & Girls Club, support our schools' bond issues, and now to help The Trail Blazers build hiking and biking trails.

I believe there are still two defining characteristics above all others that make Fountain Hills what and who we are. Yes, we have the world's fourth highest fountain, professional arts and cultural shows, very good schools, giving service organizations and faith communities, great restaurants and businesses, committed town employees, effective town councils, great parks, recreation areas, golf courses, bike trails, hiking trails, and smooth streets. Other communities have many of these qualities.

What sets us apart from the others? We are truly a "hometown by nature" in spirit, geography, and definition. And talented people have properly supported and managed our resources. If this continues our identity is safe; past, present and future.

Three thoughts

A letter from:
Boe James

1. Regarding the property tax special election, please study the material and/or attend one or more of the various information sessions about it. I have studied the issues and will be voting yes.

I am a conservative Republican, so you might think it strange that I would vote for a new tax. I don't like to add taxes; I think the better method is to control spending. Currently, I think our Town of Fountain Hills has done pretty much all it can to control spending and I recognize the needs for increased revenue. Despite my aversion to taxes, I firmly believe that this proposed property tax is the best solution for the town and urge you to vote yes on May 15.

2. We all know that the fairs bring many people as visitors to Fountain Hills. We know that many come back because of their experience at the fairs. The question I heard most often, other than what is the cost of something or when is the next drawing, was "when does the fountain go off?" Many of our tourists and I would love it if the fountain went on more often or for longer periods during fair weekends. Wouldn't it be nice if our famous fountain were on for more than just the 15 minutes an hour?

3. Speaking of the fair, as a resident, I want to thank everyone who participated in some way to making the Great Fair a successful event. Thanks to the Chamber for putting it on. Thanks to all the volunteers at the various service booths and to the Purple People who help the vendors. And a special thanks to all who worked at or visited the VFW beer gardens.

Vote yes

A letter from:
Jackie Miles

I have done a lot of things for myself, especially in my younger years. I have painted rooms in our house, taken care of our yard and kept our swimming pool clean and chemically balanced.

But I cannot repave our street (and goodness knows, Inca Avenue is full of cracks, chips and potholes). And I am unable to drive an ambulance, fight a large fire, or arrest a burglar, if that were needed at my house.

Therefore, I am going to vote yes for a primary property tax when I get my mail-in ballot in April. Sometimes it takes a village to do the things one individual cannot do alone.

Fixed income

A letter from:
Alan Grosso

The Town of Fountain Hills will once again ask us to approve a primary property tax. Fountain Hills draws many elderly people who are mostly focused on retirement. Perhaps having a low property tax is one of the reasons.

The fact is that retiring on a fixed income is quite challenging, as our basic living expenses are constantly increasing. As property owners, we also bear the burden of the never-ending requests for more money from sanitary, water and school districts, state and local government.

The idea of having two property taxes on my property is quite distasteful. Just look at the increasing tax burden on property owners in cities like Scottsdale and Phoenix. In addition, the town's renters have an opportunity to vote to increase taxes on property owners

and don't necessarily bear any of the financial burdens.

This will not be a small tax increase nor will it remain stable. It will be just a matter of time before property owners will be facing another out-of-control expense. I urge all property owners to not let that happen.

Cut what?

A letter from:
Don Doty

Following prolonged exploration to remedy the town's financial shortfall, we are once again back to considering a primary property tax.

There are a few opposed to this solution, implying that the town has a spending problem even when the facts indicate that each year we spend less than the majority of our neighboring towns.

Those critical and opposed have not offered constructive proposals as to how to spend less. There is unfounded criticism related to how the town acquired many amenities; art work, greening, downtown improvement, Community Garden, tennis court refurbishment and the Preserve trailhead. These projects, that benefited our community, were financed by private donations, grants and voter-directed specific disbursements, and little town funds. The town's spending on these projects was eliminated or significantly minimized. This is not frivolous spending but strategic and judicious.

Testimony to the commitment to address the shortfall was the recent consideration of a lagoon that an independent study and public pushback sacked. Considering this unconventional venture exemplifies the town's near desperation to define a new revenue source. This failure may have been an intended outcome.

Coupled with the council's conclusion that increasing sales tax, fees or imposing a public safety district fee will not satisfy the looming deficiency convinced the council to initiate the primary property tax initiative.

The opposed, vague notion to just spend less is not helpful without specific suggestions as to what they want cut in the spending budget. Admittedly, this is a daunting challenge since nearly half the general fund is now consumed by police/fire/court. One fourth for mandatory operational services, leaving the rest for parks and community services.

Cut what? Compared to our neighbors, we already are and have been one of the lowest spending/citizen towns. Protect our town, vote yes for the primary property tax.

Bottom line

A letter from:
Tracey Today

Say no to property tax increase. A proponent of the property tax increase recently explained property taxes need to be increased because the sales tax "just isn't cutting it." My current property taxes aren't much less than what they were back east (one of the 10 highest property tax states in the country).

However, taxes back east included snow removal, garbage/recycle/yard waste pick-up, weekly residential street cleaning, all of which are not included in Fountain Hills property taxes. Arizona sales tax is considerably higher and is spread over tourism to keep our property taxes lower.

Fountain Hills has many empty commercial business buildings, which have been empty for years, yet they're adding more. Vote yes on the Economic Development Department working harder on bringing retail businesses and tourism to Fountain Hills.

Old Town Scottsdale, Cave Creek and Carefree have done it and done it well. Fountain Hills needs more retail tourism businesses, which will increase sales tax. Fountain Hills has one department store. This forces residents to support Scottsdale's economy, being forced to shop there.

I understand the property tax increase is to cover fire stations and police departments. Do we really need fire stations every mile, and how much crime do we have? Fountain Hills is asking homeowners to support their town, yet no consideration is being given to homeowners by the Town of Fountain Hills, which has allowed eyesores like fire departments, water tank facilities and apartment complexes to be built in our neighborhoods, ruining values of homes and the beauty of our area.

Is it poor planning, budgeting, or greed and the bottom line?

Trust

A letter from:
James Judge

Can we trust the council to spend property tax money as promised?

After talking with dozens of people, from fellow citizens to business owners, sales clerks and many of my senior friends, I continue to hear concerns about how the \$7M property tax will be spent. As you may know, these dollars

Our viewpoint

Say something

"School safety" used to mean no running in the halls and the occasional fire drill, but the phrase has taken on a tragically different meaning over the past decade or so.

It's a subject nobody likes to talk about because talking about it means we have to face the reality that the unthinkable has happened and very well could happen again. Fire drills are now coupled with "active shooter drills," where students and teachers must learn the steps to best protect themselves in the event of a tragedy similar to the one that recently took place in Florida.

We've already seen additional security measures utilized on campuses here in Fountain Hills. From more secure fences to completely remodeled entrances, additional security cameras and beyond, work has been done in recent years to make school safety a top priority.

But more can always be done. To that end, Maricopa County Sheriff's Capt. Hank Brandimarte recently spoke to the town council about measures taken to strengthen school safety in our community. MCSO has already taken part in active shooter drills of its own. They've got another session planned in Queen Creek next month and plan to hold additional sessions on local campuses at some point in the future to better familiarize deputies with each campus.

But Capt. Brandimarte's most important message during his recent chat with the council is one we've all heard time and time again: if you see something, say something.

It's the kind of message you would be forgiven for letting lose its weight. If you hear something like that enough times, you eventually stop hearing it altogether. But we all need to hear it again and, more importantly, take it to heart.

Locally, you can "say something" anonymously thanks to the Text-A-Tip program. For those who wish to keep the Text-A-Tip number handy, simply save the number for CRIMES (274637) in your phone. When you send a text to that number to report a cause for concern, begin the text with "FH." Briefly explain where you are and what has happened, and the situation will be looked into. Again, this is a completely anonymous program that has already led to numerous interventions and arrests in Fountain Hills.

are targeted for roads, police/fire ever-increasing costs, replacement of the environmental fee and preserving the town's assets—such as buildings, programs, parks, and many deferred maintenance needs.

Our town council is keenly aware of public scrutiny when money is spent on any projects, initiatives or improvements. To help maintain the public trust, our town manager and town finance director have committed to give quarterly updates beginning in Q3 and Q4 of this year showing where dollars are being spent from the primary property tax fund.

As evidence that our tax dollars are already spent efficiently, Fountain Hills has achieved the second-lowest cost expense per citizen to operate the town of the 10 nearby communities. Queen Creek is the lowest. That shows me our town leaders have worked really hard to cut expenses before having to resort to the proposed tax.

Unlike the property taxes we pay Maricopa County, where very little is returned to us, every dollar raised from the primary property tax will be used only in Fountain Hills.

I firmly believe that we enjoy what we have in our wonderful town today is because of the decisions our past leaders have made. Some weren't always popular, but they were the right decisions at the right time and I have a lot of confidence that our current leaders will do the same.

Justification

A letter from:
Ray McGinley

There is no justification for a \$7 million increase in property taxes, as proposed by town government.

This is a 41 percent increase to the operating

fund budget currently set at \$16.9M. The FY 17-18 proposed budget presented by the town estimates the operating fund budget shortfall at 3.5 percent per year for the next four years. How can anyone justify an immediate 41 percent increase to cover a 3.5 percent shortfall?

The rationale offered by the town relies on a 10-year crystal ball of worst case assumptions with vague references to potential pension shortfalls, reduced fund sharing from the state and unspecified aging infrastructure. Please vote no on this proposal. There will be plenty of opportunity over the next 10 years to make budgetary adjustments as the needs materialize.

The residents have been accommodating in approval of bonds for education overrides and capital projects for facilities and street paving.

Finally, if the tax increase is adopted, here is how our town will compare to the total (primary and secondary) tax rates of other communities: Carefree, zero; Cave Creek, zero; Scottsdale, 1.08 percent; Mesa, 1.10 percent; Chandler, 1.16 percent; Phoenix, 2.16 percent; Tempe, 2.49 percent; Fountain Hills, 3.65 percent.

Governments inevitably find ways to spend the tax revenues they are given. Let's keep Fountain Hills on a more reasonable rate of tax increases.

Reality

A letter from:
James Mapes

A town forecasts a \$6.5-\$7 million-dollar budget deficit per year. The town council recommends a primary property tax to balance the budget. A referendum is

(cont. on page 7A)

My Opinion

By: **Bill Myers**

Chairman,
McDowell Mountain Preservation Commission



The trailhead at the top of Adero Canyon in our Town is becoming a reality after almost 15 years of planning. Our trailhead will include a 50-car destination parking lot, picnic tables, gazebo, restrooms and the entrance to the Fountain Hills Preserve.

The Preserve is about 1,000 acres on the west side of town. To give some perspective on its size, our town – including the preserve – is about 14,000 acres and the town lake is about 35 acres. The preserve and its trailhead is an important part of our town.

Town voters approved a bond in 1997. With that bond, plus sales tax revenue, the preserve land was purchased. That bond has been paid in full. In addition, the town instituted a development fee that raised about \$1.8 million to pay for the bulk of the trailhead construction costs. The trailhead is anticipated to be completed this year. The \$1.8 million must be used only for the trailhead construction by 2020 or the town would lose all of those monies. That would be a very poor occurrence if the town allowed that to happen.

With completion of the trailhead, town citizens will finally have excellent access to the Fountain Hills Preserve. One can step out of their car in the trailhead and walk 50 feet or many miles. With eight miles of trails that have been built by town volunteer trailblazers, the preserve, with the trailhead, is a wonderful asset for our town.

The ambiance, with no development on that desert, the mountain views to the west, the exercise from walking on the trails, the educational benefits, the economic lift and many other positive characteristics make our Fountain Hills Preserve and the trailhead a great addition to the town.

The citizens of Fountain Hills recognized the value to our town in the past by voting yes on approving funds for the preserve and I anticipate the Fountain Hills citizens will again support our town with a positive vote on the proposed primary property tax. Preserve our preserve and our great town.

I believe our citizens and guests will immensely enjoy and benefit from the preserve and the Adero Canyon trailhead. This is money well invested.

THE FOUNTAIN HILLS TIMES

(USPS 060-750)

Owned and published every Wednesday by
Western States Publishers, Inc.
P.O. Box 17869

Fountain Hills, AZ 85268

(480) 837-1925 Office
(480) 837-1951 Fax

For news updates use
The Times On-Line
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Member: Arizona Newspapers Association
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Fountain Hills Chamber of Commerce



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Letters deadline noon Monday

All letters must be submitted by noon on Monday to be considered for publication in that week's edition. It is preferred they be emailed to ryan@fhtimes.com. They also can be dropped off at The Times office, 16508 E. Laser Dr., mailed to P.O. Box 17869, Fountain Hills, AZ 85268-7869 or faxed to 480-837-1951.

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Fountain Hills, AZ 85269-7869

Periodicals Postage Paid Class at Scottsdale, Arizona.

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