

City Talk Column for February 28, 2024  
City Manager's Office  
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### **Successes happen when we work cooperatively**

Of all the levels of government, the local level is closest to the people they serve. Cities and towns are where community is built. Public servants work directly alongside community members to solve problems and enhance quality of life for all. In addition to a city's broad responsibilities like keeping people safe, building and maintaining parks and roads, managing growth and development, supporting cultural and social service programs, etc., a city is also responsible to address the many unique and increasingly complex needs that are specific to that jurisdiction. In our city there is no shortage of those. The work is diverse, challenging, sometimes maddening, but when it culminates in community successes, is also very rewarding. Both city staff and those we serve have important roles and responsibilities if we are to be the best community we can be.

When it works best, all community stakeholders have a say in how their city is governed and issues are addressed. It is the city's obligation, and our pledge, to provide easy access to the information and mechanisms necessary for residents and others to meaningfully engage in decision-making. As city representatives we must listen to everyone, even our critics, closely and respectfully. We must foster dialogue with community members and be responsive to concerns. We must also carefully consider options, conduct thoughtful and objective analyses and do it all with sincerity and transparency.

Community members also have a responsibility to seek out the correct information, engage earnestly, explore other perspectives and be willing to compromise for the common good. Unlike the private sector, government has a responsibility to provide programs and services that don't maximize profit but make a difference in the lives of those who benefit from its provision. It is no small feat to promote the "well-being of the entire community" when the entire community and its needs, beliefs and perspectives are so diverse. In a community of over 9,000 residents, hundreds of businesses, nonprofits, special interest groups, and other governmental partners, we are bound to have different opinions about virtually everything. But it is next to impossible to find positive approaches, particularly to complex and emotion-laden issues, if people are so entrenched in their personal positions that they are unwilling to listen to and consider each other. Some programs, projects and initiatives may align with your specific interests and needs, but others will not. That doesn't mean that they don't have value to your neighbors.

Also, too often the issues are overshadowed by misinformation and lack of understanding. When misinformation is perpetuated through social media or in passing at the grocery store, it only serves to inflame already sensitive issues and create further division in the community. It promotes discontent and even anger. But, if we reject hearsay and seek the facts, context, history and other insights first, we still may not ultimately agree with the approach or decision but may obtain a better understanding of the "why" behind it and gain some valuable perspective. When communicating, hyperbole isn't helpful either. Personal attacks and vitriol, even less so. If we communicate respectfully, we have an even better chance of really hearing each other. City staff are committed to engaging community members around difficult issues.

I invite you to take advantage of the many ways to engage with the city. A great starting point could be participation in the city's Citizens Academy, a nine-week program where residents have an opportunity

to learn about the inner workings of the various city departments, programs and activities, directly from the city staffers who are responsible for them. Unfailingly, participants come to have a greater appreciation for the professionalism, dedication, and talent of the men and women who fill city staff positions. In turn, we learn more about the makeup and needs of our citizenry and identify common goals.

Our city is full of caring residents and competent city professionals. I see city staff strive to respond with empathy and understanding to our community members and try their best to serve you well. I believe Sedona is enriched by the work of our city employees. It is also enriched by the passion, action and engagement of our citizens which inevitably helps facilitate our community's achievements. The role of our public employees and the contributions from our community members are both vital to the success of our community. It is the times when we work cooperatively that complex and challenging issues can be meaningfully addressed and successes happen.