

'Green' as planning tool new way of looking at old idea

MY TURN

Reading Robert Leger's article, "Shaping the future of Phoenix," on Sunday gave me pause and some cause for celebration.

Celebration for the fact that "green" has been recognized as a top issue that will shape the Valley's future. Pause, in that, most of the Phoenix City Council candidates mentioned in the article do not have a clear plan on how to make this happen and many seem to avoid the subject altogether.

In a way this is understandable. Governmental officers have had to face the daunting questions of quality of life, budget, jobs, development and leadership for centuries. Because of this, there are clear and established prece-



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dents and processes on what to do. Though Phoenix has an impressive sustainability program, green is nevertheless apparently seen as something new and without firm foundation on exactly how to make it work. Uncertain ground is uncomfortable for most people. Thus, I propose the following solution.

Much as when President John F. Kennedy stated, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country," an intellectual flip can bring clarity to a situation. In this case it is likely that in our zeal to plan to be green, we have forgotten that we can use green to plan.

In the same manner as Mr. Leger states that light rail, zoning and downtown are developmental tools, so is green. Over the past 40 years, we have created a vast array of processes and technologies designed to help us better manage our resources and create sustainable/green (economically, socially and environmentally superior) results. Thus, with these new tools in hand, we can now ask new questions.

For example, if our goal is to create jobs, what green tools are available that will help us accomplish this? The same question holds true for quality of life, jobs, development and productivity.

Most importantly, greening the process helps to green the results, which is better for us all in the long run. Using green as a planning tool is simply a new way of looking at an old idea.

From grandma during the Depression planting a garden and patching clothes to light rail, the Rio Salado habitat restoration area and the Hope VI housing project today, this basic process is at the foundation of most successful green projects even if green is nowhere in the name. It simply works.

I do not suggest that is a panacea. However, when green is properly applied in combination with all of the other methodologies the city uses to create a higher quality of life for its citizens, superior results do occur. I encourage our council candidates to give this concept some thought.

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From the Arizona Republic Newspaper Friday Aug 28, 2009

5 Issues Shaping Phoenix's Future by Robert Leger begins on the next page

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August 23, 2009 |

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The nine candidates battling in three contested races for the Phoenix [City Council](#) have attended numerous forums, telling potential voters where they stand on issues.

But the forums served another purpose. They highlighted what residents see as the key issues in these races and for the council after the Sept. 1 election.

Here's a look at five of the top issues facing the candidates, who are:

- Peggy Neely, unopposed in northeast Phoenix's District 2.
- [Tom Simplot](#) and Robert D. Johnson in central Phoenix's District 4.
- Sal DiCiccio, Dana Kennedy, Nathan Oshop and Barry Paceley in District 6, which includes Biltmore, Arcadia and Ahwatukee.
- Jon Garrido, Darlene Jackson and Michael Johnson in south Phoenix's District 8.

1. Quality of life

All politics is local, and the most passion comes on issues that strike us where we live.

In south Phoenix's District 8, it's Fisher Sand & Gravel.

In central Phoenix's District 4, it's the "suicide lanes" on Seventh Street and Seventh Avenue.

In the barbell-shaped District 6, it's the [South Mountain](#) Freeway in Ahwatukee and redevelopment along Camelback Road in Arcadia and Biltmore.

There isn't an easy fix to any of these challenges. In some cases, it may be impossible to get what the closest neighbors want. It might not even be the right answer for the city.

But this, not the Big Issues, is where elections are won or lost.

Six of the candidates in contested races understand this. They're well-versed on their district's vital issues.

The three candidates running as a slate - Garrido, Oshop and Robert D. Johnson - dismiss these issues and instead focus on proposing an immense tourism-focused development on the Salt River. They were long shots to begin with, but ignoring the thorns that most irritate a district's voters lengthens their odds.

The takeaway: The best-seller may be titled "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff," but a political candidate who follows that advice needs to look for another calling.

2. Budget cuts

Audience members at the three forums *The Arizona Republic* co-sponsored had many questions about the drastic cuts made in this year's [city budget](#) and the outlook for next year.

"What makes you the candidate most prepared to protect vital services during times when the revenues the city receives may no longer cover the costs?" one asked. Others wanted to know if the candidates would support a temporary tax instead of further cuts.

And one got right to the point: "Why does the city keep cutting back on parks/rec/pools? Stop it!"

Voters may understand the economic challenge, but they still want a budget that delivers a high [quality of life](#).

None of the candidates has been particularly good at responding to that sentiment. Incumbents largely defend the budget choices they made. Challengers criticize specific cuts but rarely specify what they would have trimmed instead.

The takeaway: The budget is where the action is. A candidate who makes a firm commitment on next year's budget will win admiration but could lose votes.

3. Development and jobs

[City government](#) doesn't create jobs. The private sector does. But that doesn't keep voters from asking candidates how they would get the economy back on track and people back to work.

Government can create conditions for development. The CityNorth incentive was an attempt to do that, though it doesn't go over with the candidates. Only Councilman Michael Johnson supported it. DiCiccio said that he thought the incentive was a bad idea but that the city had an obligation to defend it in court.

Incentives, though, are far from the only or best way for a city to create the conditions for jobs and tax revenue.

Light rail is an economic-development tool. So is zoning. So are city leaders who seek to smooth differences between developers and neighbors. Downtown should be, but it is still striving for an identity. When candidates were asked the new name for marketing downtown, they drew a blank.

They don't do much better in advancing ideas for reigniting Phoenix's economy. There are a lot of lofty statements and platitudes but few solid proposals.

The takeaway: Everyone talks about jobs, but really, only the private sector is equipped to create them.

4. Leadership

When it comes to leadership, the next two years will be unsettled.

This election will mark the beginning of Phil Gordon's final two years as mayor. Although he may not be ready to be a lame duck, the jockeying to succeed him will only intensify. (For the record, incumbents DiCiccio, Johnson and Simplot pledged to complete their four-year terms if they win, which would rule out a run for mayor.)

Longtime City Manager Frank Fairbanks is retiring. Hiring his replacement will be the biggest immediate decision the new council makes.

And then there is Public Safety Manager Jack Harris. Ask candidates whether he should remain on the job and watch them squirm. Michael Johnson, the incumbent in District 8, dodged the question. District 4 candidate Robert D. Johnson offered support, then equivocated. The other candidates offered firm to qualified support, except for District 6 candidate Barry Paceley. He's ready to jettison Harris.

With so many questions about leadership, it becomes more important for the council to fill the vacuum. But can it? The council operates more like a confederation of fiefdoms. And the only candidates talking about reaching beyond district lines are the longshot slate of Garrido, Oshop and Robert D. Johnson.

The takeaway: Leaders build bridges from where we are to where we need to be. Where's the Army Corps of Engineers when you need it?

5. Going green

Gordon is pushing for Phoenix to become the greenest city in the country, an ambitious goal to encourage alternative energy and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. It would seem to be ripe for debate in this election.

But unless voters ask about it, the issue is getting precious little attention. Outside of Robert D. Johnson, who works at an energy-consulting firm, no candidate is promoting a green agenda. Environmental issues are no-shows on campaign Web sites.

Does that mean Gordon is out of touch? Not at all. Pushing to be the greenest city brings more than environmental benefits.


It also promotes good jobs. Consider the recent announcement that a Phoenix company won \$100 million in federal stimulus money to build electric-car recharging stations.

The takeaway: Kermit the Frog was onto something when he sang "It's Not Easy Being Green." But the song has a new refrain, one the candidates should learn. Being green is the future.


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 "I have always taken the lead to organize neighbors to be active and involved. When my neighborhood needed leadership and direction, I stepped to the forefront to organize with my neighbors to eliminate graffiti, prostitution and drug trafficking."

- **Robert D. Johnson,**
District 4 candidate

"(The Seventh Street/Seventh Avenue suicide lanes) affect our life, our businesses and how we move around the central part of the city. Everyone wants them in our area but don't want them in their own."

- **Tom Simplot,**
District 4 incumbent

"In one way, this recession is an opportunity to think differently. We can't solve the city's problems unless we have guidance and direction of our boss - you, the public. While we have citizen committees for nearly everything in Phoenix, we don't have one to guide us to where we want to be in five, 10 or 25 years. That is what we must do, create a citizen-driven task force to develop a written strategic plan.

- **Sal DiCiccio,**
District 6 incumbent

"I really felt I needed to get into this race because I believed I had something to say and issues worth fighting for."

- **Dana Marie Kennedy,**
District 6 candidate

"Let's give people a reason to come to Phoenix other than to get to Scottsdale, the Grand Canyon or Sedona. We need to get money back to Phoenix. We need to create jobs."

- **Nathan Oshop,**
District 6 candidate

"What I bring to the City Council is integrity. We have a lot of nonsense floating around right now in City Hall."

- **Barry Pacey,**
District 6 candidate

"Do you know what the first question people ask when they leave the convention center? 'How do we get to Scottsdale?' . . . The only way to bring money for downtown is with tourists, not students."

- **Jon Garrido,**
District 8 candidate

"When you talk about social-services programs, I have probably been the biggest (advocate) fighting for our fair