



Just The Facts!

Autumn has reached our fair City and we look forward to a joyous holiday season. As we move toward the end of the year, we at the City welcome your continued comments and inquiries and hope this issue of Just The Facts continues to be informative to our Citizens.



About the Verde Santa Fe Annexation

The City of Cottonwood was approached earlier this year by a group of homeowners in Verde Santa Fe (the housing development on Cornville Road, east of SR 89A) asking if the City would annex their community. The City Council held two public meetings and concluded that there existed enough interest to begin the annexation process that would give each property owner the opportunity to express their support or opposition. The Council also agreed that the decision to annex would rest with the property owners and any arguments for or against the annexation would need to be made by the opposing parties. The City would be ready to pursue the legal requirements of the annexation process and provide factual information regardless of which party requested the information.

Unfortunately, some parties who have concerns about the outcome of the annexation have disseminated incorrect or misleading information that needs to be corrected. The use of misinformation is not surprising as it has occurred during the past annexation efforts involving the Verde Village area.

The first important piece of information is that residents of Verde Santa Fe will receive very qualified fire and emergency medical response from either the fire district or the Cottonwood Fire Department. The difference between the two agencies is that the fire district is paid for through a property tax and the Cottonwood Fire service is paid for through

sales tax that is collected throughout the city. The fire district provides emergency medical transport and for Cottonwood residents such services are provided by a private, non-profit company. Both the district and the private company bill Medicaid, Medicare or your private insurance company for the cost of transport. Any amount not covered through the billings is absorbed by the district where as the private company will bill the person transported.

The other misleading information that is being distributed is that the City of Cottonwood's budget increased by approximately \$32 million in the fiscal year 2010/11. The truth is that it did and this is not unusual for a city, county or private business. This increase simply represents a "spending authority", not necessarily what is actually going to be spent. Such differences in budgets from year-to-year may involve the purchase or financing of large capital projects or purchases. For the City regarding this particular year, the City was planning on refinancing water bonds to gain a lower rate of interest payments for financing we already have in place. However, by the law, the city budget must reflect that level of spending authority.

Another misleading statement is that Cottonwood is planning to impose a property tax. There has been no discussion of a property tax by this City Council and such a tax would require a vote of our citizens.

In one document that was distributed there was a claim that Cottonwood sales tax was 4 percent. The actual sales tax is 3 percent

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Why Do We Need a New Reclamation Plant?

Some people in our community have asked for the reasons we need a new reclamation plant since we have a fully functioning wastewater plant on Mingus Avenue. The operational reasons involve a sewer line that runs from Riverfront Park to Garrison Park, that is being used over its capacity and the line is beginning to

deteriorate. At the current rate of over use, our engineers estimate we will need to replace that sewer line in five to seven years if we do not reduce the capacity. In lieu of replacing the sewer line with a larger line, our engineers have come up with an option that makes much more environmental and operational sense.

The other option is to treat the wastewater in a location where the reclaimed water from the treatment process can be reused. Since Riverfront Park is our largest and most used

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City park, with acres of grass and other lands that need to be irrigated, the engineers surmised that it made the most sense to keep the treated water in the area of the park to be reused. This is not a new concept as the general landscaping around Cottonwood Ranch and the new development of Mesquite Hills use reclaimed water from the wastewater plant on Mingus Avenue, which produces grade A plus reclaimed water. In fact, we are now working with Yavapai College to serve this same reclaimed water to irrigate their new vineyards (Yes, A Plus reclaimed water is safe for edible agriculture.) The only difference between the water produced at the plant on Mingus Avenue and the new Riverfront Park Plant is that the water will be even cleaner at Riverfront Park. The water will be grade A Plus and will also have pharmaceuticals removed and meet Verde River standards. Essentially, this is very safe water, even to drink.

Even more important than the operational value of this new plant is the strategic value. If you have not heard, you should be aware that water is a limited resource in Arizona and more so in the Verde Valley. The people in the Verde

Valley have been fortunate we have not had to pay a fee for the water we pump out of the ground to support our water needs. Those days are coming to an end. Unless you have water rights that go back further than 1900, the water you use probably belongs to someone else such as the Salt River Project or the Yavapai Apache Nation. Both of these entities have Senior water rights that include all of the Verde River and its tributaries. The question comes down to how much of the groundwater in the Verde Valley is counted as part of the Verde River and its tributaries. We may all be paying for the water we use in the not too distant future; we currently pay for the cost of pumping the water out of the ground and delivering it to your home. Therefore, we need to find ways to reuse water many times to maximize the use and reduce costs.

The other strategic reason for this new reclamation plant is to keep the Verde River flowing. We all enjoy what the river brings to the Verde Valley and there is much economic value derived by the river. It is important to our quality of life to keep it flowing. We currently irrigate Riverfront Park using river water. By using reclaimed water we can keep that water in the river and even contribute more water to the river from the reclamation plant when we

do not have a local use for the water. Remember, this is water that meets Verde River standards.

We are also looking at ways to make more use of reclaimed water such as constructing a reclaim line throughout the City to be used to irrigate landscaping at our other parks and schools. We are already beginning to develop fire hydrant lines that use reclaimed water and in the future, new home developments where reclaim water is available, will be required to create dual plumbing in homes so that all non-drinking uses such as fire sprinklers, flushing toilets, landscaping, etc., are done with reclaimed water.

This new, small reclamation plant will be the first for Cottonwood and for Arizona. The plans have already been shared with the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and they recognize this plant represents the future for the Verde Valley. This plant sets the standard and allows us to reuse water in a safe, effective manner to reduce the costs and protect a resource that we have found to be finite in a desert state.

Annexation Continued

which is consistent with surrounding communities. In fact, in the Verde Valley, Cottonwood is the only jurisdiction without a property tax related to your property, fire services, or water and sewer services.

Concern has been expressed about the City being able to maintain 12 new firefighters that were initially funded through a federal grant. The grant pays for a portion of the firefighters for four years at a smaller percentage each year. The City will assume the full cost of those

firefighters following the end of the grant, with no additional costs to our citizens. The City would not have accepted the grant if we could not sustain the positions following the termination of the grant. In fact, a requirement of the grant requires sustained funding for the positions. Those additional costs have been planned for future budgets without increasing revenues.

The final misleading piece of information insinuated that the City mishandled the Tao Fellowship related to the Mago statue. Similar to the Tao Fellowship retreat center that became a

challenge for the County, the Mago statue was removed and a better working relationship with the Tao Fellowship has emerged.

Finally, it is important for all of our citizens to know that the City Council would not have pursued this annexation if they felt it would result in additional costs to our citizens or to the residents of Verde Santa Fe. The Council feels the annexation process is a fair method for the residents of Verde Santa Fe to decide what is best for their community. In that spirit, it is important they make decisions based on factual information and the City stands ready to provide any information required in an accurate and impartial way.

If you have questions about the annexation process or other topics, please contact City Hall at 634-5526 or our City Manager at dbartosh@cottonwoodaz.gov.

City of Cottonwood Administrative Contact Information

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