

One Salida responds

Guest opinion

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Joe Jordan, Columnist

Thanks to everyone for the widespread interest in OneSalida.org's website.

One Salida is a nonpartisan coalition of citizens and businesses formed to promote good leadership and to provide Solidans with factual, verifiable information on important issues for public reference during the campaign season. We welcome feedback and appreciate opportunities to increase accuracy on our site.

In response to Councilman Hal Brown's guest opinion in The Mountain Mail of Aug. 31, we checked the facts and refined our content about the potential Belmont project.

Our conclusion is unchanged. That project was lost by the city of Salida along with 60 housing units, including 48 low-income affordable housing units and \$1.2 million in tax credits and grants. The subsidy went instead to a 48-unit project now underway in Buena Vista. More on the Belmont issue below.

The guiding priority of One Salida is laying out a standard for good governance, which is what is called for as we move forward. Citizens want government to address growth, housing, betterment of our economy and maintenance of our small-town character and quality of life.

We believe good governance requires trust of government by the community. Trust, in turn, requires open, two-way communications between elected officials and the people, as well as a stable, qualified, city administration. Legal services, when necessary, should serve the interests of the people of Salida and be fiscally sound.

Another priority of One Salida is to help citizens make well-informed decisions about our leadership and the issues facing our community. We do so by linking verifiable information with these issues. This information is available to all candidates in hopes they will, if elected, improve the quality of governance of the city.

We have no agenda or desire to rehash the early history of Vandaveer and the Salida Natural Resource Center Development Corp. Rather, we wish to inform people of current council's actions regarding Vandaveer and the NRCDC.

We wish to explore whether recent and current actions are in the best interest of the people of Salida. For example, why did this council give away its rights in the 190-acre Vandaveer property, including the Forest Service building, with no citizen input? And why does the city

take an adversarial posture with the NRCDC rather than work with it for the best interest of Salidans?

We chose the potential Belmont project as the first issue to delve into because it illustrates many of the major issues facing Salida: housing, good governance, transparency and trust. We believe it's time for bold visions for the future rather than continued focus on controversies of the past.

Nine months of hard work by city staff, the NRCDC, Lowry and Belmont represented a bold vision. However, when the project came to Salida City Council for approval of a plan to provide infrastructure critical to the proposed Belmont development, old fears prevailed.

To the surprise of most of the council members, the city attorney raised a highly questionable Taxpayer's Bill of Rights issue, which delayed and ultimately killed the project.

Council later learned that the TABOR question had been assigned by the mayor to the city attorney three months earlier. Had full council been informed by the mayor at that time, council could have hired a qualified TABOR expert in time to dispose of the TABOR issue, and the affordable housing project would be a reality in Salida today. This is a governance issue.

One Salida is interested in the process used by council to direct the attorney to perform tasks – often by the mayor without council input or even council's prior knowledge. We are interested in the nature of those tasks and the attached \$400,000-plus price tag, paid to the city attorney from March 15, 2016, to June 30, 2017.

We are not interested in impugning anyone's character or engaging in aggressive exchanges. Rather, we wish to model the open, transparent, factual, verifiable and informative dialogue we citizens of Salida desire.

We will continue to discuss issues and provide the information citizens want. Please visit OneSalida.org for the real story and to offer your comments and questions. We look forward to an interesting election season with lots of citizen participation!

Joe Jordan is a retired lawyer living in Salida.