

# Guest opinion Mayor lists successes of present city council

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by Jim LiVecchi

I am honored to have served our great community.

I entered the mayor position professionally and wish to exit professionally. As part of the transition I sent numerous “Should Know” files, such as Chaffee County Economic Overview, Key Industry Report and Comprehensive Plan. I invited all incoming council members to an informal meeting with our attorney, administrator and mayor pro-tempore.

This council’s accomplishments have made Salida a better place to live and work. The creation of accounting funds – Street, Capital Improvement, Lodging Tax and Economic Development – are important transparency monitors.

To mention a few of this council’s successes: increasing pay for our city employees, instrumental in the Scout Hut project, pickleball courts at Centennial Park, Hunt and Palmer street projects and UV Water Treatment project.

Note: these were accomplished without huge budget overruns that characterized previous administrations. We also successfully defined municipal position scopes of work and transitioned the city administrator, city attorney, community development director and director of finance positions.

A special thanks must go out to our citizens who voted for 2A “de-Brucing.”

Salida’s long-term debt for governmental activities decreased from \$6,915,234 to \$1,468,259 due to the involved elected officials’ fiscal management and Salida Natural Resource Center Development Corp. divestiture efforts during my tenure.

This represents a \$5,446,975 decrease in municipal debt, a 79 percent reduction. Over a two-year period these are staggering debt reduction numbers. Let me say that again: 79 percent reduction. We also eliminated costly municipal subsidies to the corporation.

In addition, we settled the Dominick lawsuit after a half-dozen-plus years of costly litigation. We also protected the city’s water right interests and have preserved Salida’s real property interest in and title claims to Vandaveer Ranch. We did all of this despite enormous pressure from self-interested parties to do something other than guard the city’s interests.

I am disappointed I was not able to address some of my goals. Hopefully, the next council will prioritize some of them.

Drug police officer: to combat methamphetamine/opiates.

Shuttle: linking downtown with U.S. 50, also linking Chaffee County.

In-house attorney: Scope of work has been completed and protocol is in process.

Charter franchise: renewal and PEG station facility.

Parking: Union Pacific parcel with a bridge linking Salida Rotary Amphitheater.

Infrastructure: Street projects, intersection and curb cuts.

Staffing: public information officer half-time, human resource director half-time.

Salida Municipal Codes: revisions.

Scopes of work: finance director, treasurer, city clerk.

Salida Housing Task Force: Housing code changes for housing city employees.

I have always said every two years the council's dynamics will change. Campaign promises will define this incoming council. Good governance depends on integrity, honesty and professionalism and is not the product of slogans or sleights of hand.

I have been asked, "What is your worst fear if you are not elected?"

To mention a few of my concerns:

NRCDC: Some on council may ignore or turn a blind eye.

Title issues: The pieces are in place to reclaim Vandaveer Ranch. The city does not have to give the ranch away to the NRCDC and developers.

Dry-up: Salida is losing 17 percent of water entitlement the citizens have paid for.

Solar panels at Forest Service building: Council member Cheryl Brown-Kovacic revealed the city is paying 19 percent more for electricity under the current contract using the solar panels. Contract renegotiations are underway and must be completed. The city needs to complete its exit from the USFS site installation.

Infrastructure: Under the sphere of "affordable housing" council is being lured into use taxpayers' money to pay millions of dollars for utilities, streets, water and gas to Vandaveer Ranch.

Recreation center: a \$30-\$40 million cost to our citizens.

Indemnity: forgiving the \$1.4 million owed the citizens for corporate subsidies.

Water and sewer taps: I foresee again under the catch phrase “affordable housing” developers requesting incentives. In reality, these incentives will be absorbed by water and sewer increases and make a few richer. Follow the money.

Lawsuits: Since some on council are in this circle of friends, I am concerned the council will walk away from these frivolous lawsuits and the city will absorb all the costs.

So, what are my fears? Salida’s water rates doubling like they did in 2011. Rate increases hit our most vulnerable, those who pay their utilities at the cost of not filling needed prescriptions. Other fear items are mentioned above. Unfortunately the length of this editorial is limited, though my fears are not.

Did I tell you about the 79 percent reduction in long-term debt?

Thanks for allowing me to be your mayor.

*Jim LiVecchi is the outgoing mayor of Salida.*