

Candidate Forum Questions

Donna McBride

1. Marketing Casa Grande is important to its Economic Development. There is a current effort in the community to establish a “Destination Marketing Organization”. Its purpose would be to market and brand Casa Grande. Other communities have funded these efforts through a bed tax. Do you support such an effort? If you do support it, how would you propose the City fund and manage this effort?

A collaborative effort between organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, hospitality industry officials and Access Arizona are interested in creating an organization to help make Casa Grande an attractive destination spot. Great idea! We have much to offer. Casa Grande’s current bed tax of 3.8% goes to the general fund and is also used for youth programs like the Boys & Girls Club and Teen Center. Casa Grande has one of the lowest bed tax rates in our state, being paid by visitors who stay in our hotels and motels, not our residents. A slight increase in this tax could be used to market and promote Casa Grande as a destination for conferences, meetings and tourist attractions. This means more visitors will shop at our local restaurants and businesses. I support this effort. It will be critical for the stakeholders to develop a solid marketing plan with a budget that reflect their goals and objectives. The Chamber of Commerce is the logical host for this effort as it aligns with their mission to promote the community, tourism and quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses.

2. Are there needs the City is not currently addressing? What are they and how will you work to implement and pay for them?

Roughly 80% of community growth comes from existing employers. A rural community like Casa Grande is even more dependent on internal growth. We have been fortunate in recent years for attracting businesses. That being said, I feel we need to have a greater emphasis to look at our existing smaller businesses and focus on retainment. As a member of the Council, I would like to be part of this initiative by bringing stakeholders to the table to learn about their growth plans, needs and how the city can foster their growth. This is “proactive”, not “reactive” approach. Let’s not wait until they are closing their doors – but use local expertise through our Chamber of Commerce, Access Arizona, Central Arizona College, Arizona Workforce Connection and others - to help keep them open and thriving. I would like for the city to consider creating a city board/commission that consists of local business owners who would work in unison with our economic development office. This board would serve in an advisory capacity for city officials and staff to develop strategies together that will help our small business owners be successful. There

would be no cost as we would be utilizing the exceptional talent that we already have in the economic development office.

3. As a member of the City Council how will you balance quality of life projects with public safety needs? Would you be willing to raise property or sales taxes to meet the needs?

Raising taxes should be a last resort. It might seem like the easiest solution but certainly doesn't mean it is the best for our community and its residents. Projects need to be looked at on an individual basis, reflecting what is required, needed or simply desired. Casa Grande is known for having the foresight to employ a team of staff who are educated, experienced and capable of providing quality research before bringing issues and projects before the city council. As a city council member I would also look at what other like communities have done to embrace similar quality of life projects. Looking at their successes, challenges and how they included public safety needs can only add to our decision making process. Lastly and just as important, I would always support efforts to include community input.

4. What are the top two issues facing Casa Grande over the next five to ten years and how will you help in addressing them?

First - I feel the city must take a look at our homeless population and how it is affecting our community. We can be a champion by utilizing our strong faith community to look at the issue of our less fortunate. We must look at ways to support local resources and programs that provide services and create realistic solutions to the issue that is not going to go away. We must realize this is a community problem, not just a city government problem. The issue expands beyond the individual - but to our local businesses, safety issues, economic development livelihood and reputation as a city.

Second - managing growth and addressing its impact on transportation, schools housing and infrastructure will need to continue. Our population has grown from roughly 26,000 in 2000 to nearly 51,000. Our community needs to balance growth without losing our "small town" feel. Many people moved here because of it. It is something to be proud of. Embracing existing businesses that have roots in our community means we must ensure they have the tools for growth and success. Their success is our success.

5. How would you stimulate Economic Development in Casa Grande, e.g., incentives, a moratorium on impact fees etc.?

The City of Casa Grande has a responsibility to provide quality services to its citizens. We have to stimulate economic development that brings quality jobs and revenue. While I have not had the opportunity to see how the past incentives and impact fees were determined, I do have an understanding of how to work within

guidelines that create a unified, fair process. A formula should be used for funding economic development incentives. This will evaluate the merits of using public funds to subsidize certain costs. A scoring matrix can help both staff and council to determine the length of time and fiscal amount of incentives. It also provides a fair system for everyone. As a member of the council, I have a fiduciary responsibility to the people of Casa Grande to cast an educated, informed vote for or against the use of incentives. It will be my responsibility to incorporate research from staff while also doing my own in order to make an informed decision.

I am not in favor of a moratorium if existing residents bear the tax increase to offset the fees. Municipal impact fees are paid by developers to help fund critical infrastructure improvements such as roads, sewer and public safety. Suspending impact fees can result in project delays or require current residents to subsidize development by raising taxes or reducing services. We must look at all avenues to reach a successful conclusion that will benefit incoming development by having a clear picture of how it will affect our residents, whether it is on a short term or long term basis.

Respectfully submitted by

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Casa Grande City Council
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