

A BETTER FUTURE FOR OUR FAMILIES AND OUR CITY

Dr Bill Ullery's *weekly column*
in the White Sheet



Cell: 928.716.3014

E-Mail: dbu@dbuhomes.com

Web: www.BillUllery.com

Economic development isn't an easy sell in Havasu #1

Last month, I published a dozen articles on how to maximize the economic impact of our new university campus and the need to change from a *general law* to a *charter* form of city government. Those articles are on my website, www.billullery.com In this new series of five articles, I'll cover issues of economic development that both help and impede progress in our city.

Who needs it?

Most of us want to live in a town that's clean, safe, and prosperous. But this isn't Scottsdale (nor is it Bullshite) and most of us aren't filthy rich. We have a lot of seniors and semi-retired that need a part or full-time job to make ends meet. For them, a good economy is basic to staying in Havasu.

Moreover, most of our younger families need two wage earners just to make it...even in a town with a relatively low cost of living. It's also true that few business owners can survive in a stagnant or declining economy. In short, Havasu needs *some growth* of desirable businesses and industries. But, we also have a few folks that want **NO** growth and that's a problem for those who need a job.

We also face a challenge in growing a consensus on what's "desirable" and how to pay to get what will make us both better and more prosperous. Like the huge effort in bringing a world-class university to our community. Mayor Mark Nexsen saw the potential and declared, "*This may very well be the largest economic development project in our history.*" (TNH 3-20-10) Mayor Nexsen and his successors will need our help to achieve that potential.

Resistance

Remember the "*Singer Tax Initiative*" of 1997 that required a 2/3rds vote on any tax increase? And, the vote against the purchase of the English Village property in 2006? Or, more recently the vote against Refuge annexation proposal even though that acquisition would have resulted in more jobs and tax revenues for our city?

Progress

The next column in this series will cover some of the positive actions Havasu voters have taken such as the support of the CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureau) and the PED (Partnership for Economic Development). We'll also tackle the criticism of *Best Places* in 2006 and what our city government has done since then to achieve some success in a tough economic environment.

Like you, I want political stability and a safe community. But, in the end, *It's about our town's economy. And, our city government's role in protecting and improving our economy. It's about a better future for our city and our families.*

Many of the underlined words are active links in the version on www.BillUllery.com I want to hear from you. My phone # and email address are under the photo. **WATCH FOR MY NEXT COLUMN IN THIS SPACE**

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Economic development critics and supporters #2

Yesterday, was the first of a series of five articles on economic development. That column and all of my articles are on my website, www.billullery.com

Who does it?

The [League of AZ Cities & Towns](#) claims 90% of the jobs are in our cities. The League also notes, without exception, cities do economic development....some better than others. And, those that “do it better” weathered the recession better.

For example, a piece in The Wall Street Journal, *College towns do OK in a recession*, “While college towns have long been considered recession-resistant, their ability to avoid the depths of the financial crisis shaking the rest of the nation is noteworthy.” (6-24-10)

But, our area has always been at a disadvantage when it comes to higher education. As reported in a Today’s News-Herald article, [College grads rare in Havasu](#). “A first-of-its kind report ranks the Lake Havasu City-Kingman area as 361 out of 363 cities nationwide for the number of college graduates living here.” (12-20-04)

Ok...we’ve changed. We paved the streets. We have a new campus in partnership with a world-class university—ASU. But, our glass is half full...we have work to do. Such as a city charter to complete the transition to a full partner with ASU.

Critics

A company [Best Places](#) publishes reviews of cities for professionals in the field of economic development. And back on 12-20-06, they weren’t so kind with Havasu. “Lake Havasu has shown great resolve at staying mired in antiquated economic development strategies and not investing in their community with regard to making it a place that talented, bright and productive people would find comfortable. They have refused to invest their own dollars to create a destination that would be attractive to residents other than retirees.” Ouch...I’ll not print the rest of that nasty review. If you want the details, simply click on the active link.

But, I see a lot of bright spots and the work of the CVB, the PED, and our city government needs to be highlighted. In the next article in this series, I’ll do that. Moreover, we paved the streets and we just opened a campus of a world-class university---ASU! Yep...there’s light at the end of the tunnel. Including a charter for our city to map our progress and success with a plan and a vision.

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Economic development progress #3

Yesterday, I published the second of a series of five articles on economic development. All of my articles are on my website, www.billullery.com

Some history

Before the CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureau) and the PED (Partnership for Economic development), the city hired promoters to bolster its economy. One was fired amid allegations of inappropriate use of city credit cards. A Commission for Economic Development followed with an annual grant of \$100,000. Manned by volunteer business people, conflicts arose with city staff and council members. It too was axed. Which gave rise to the PED.

Beginning late 1981, a 3% hotel occupancy tax was levied with another 1% restaurant/bar tax levied in 1996. CVB got 75% and the PED 25%. The total for FY2011-12 was nearly \$1.5 million. These taxes and expenditures could not have evolved without support of the business community and the voters. Over the years, the sum total of such expenditures is large. But, there's more....much more.

Tax incentives

The new Wolford mall, Home Depot, Lowe's, Hobby Lobby, and other major retailers got tax incentives and rebates, improvement-cost-credits, infrastructure deals, and other assistance ranging up to \$2 million per project. \$25 million overall. In the face of a huge sewer debt, such rebates and incentives are exceedingly controversial.

Other economic development initiatives

The proposed new island bridge and the dredging of the channel are examples of economic development as are improvements to the beaches, the downtown streets, Hwy95 landscaping, and a lot of the capital outlay projects our town undertakes. But, what can we afford? What will the taxpayers tolerate?

Since the citizen CIAC or Community Investment Advisory Committee to help the city review capital project expenditures is now defunct (which is another story I'll address later), I'd give that citizen review responsibility to the PED or the CVB board. Because, we need citizen involvement in city capital project planning and most such projects should be related to our priorities of economic development.

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Economic development for a university town #4

Yesterday, I published the third of a series of five articles on economic development. All of my articles are on my website, www.billullery.com

A screeching halt

A *general law city* can spend millions on the CVB and the PED as well as millions on tax incentives, tax rebates, improvement-cost-credits, and other assistance for new business recruitment under the rubric of economic development.

But, a *general law city* can't spend a **plugged nickel** on a new public university campus. Even though,, "***This may very well be the largest economic development project in our history.***" (Mayor Nexsen TNH 3-20-10)

Havasu is a *general law city* because that was the best option for incorporating a new town that had mostly dirt streets and only a few full-year residents.

Also, understand that *general law cities* are permitted to exercise only those powers that the Arizona Constitution and statutes confer on them. It's a one-size-fits-all box for the management of local government. But, plainly stated, what worked for Lake Havasu 30 years ago is not relevant to our city today. We paved the streets and we have a world-class university in ASU. Lake Havasu City has changed!

Magna Charter

Establishing a charter government is akin to writing a constitution. It need not be complicated or controversial. To prove it I wrote one. That draft city charter is now on my website under the Reports tab, www.BillUllery.com This draft also addresses the filling of city council seats and term limits. I do need your help in critiquing this draft to make it better and, I'm willing to do the work if I get help.

It's about our city government's role in protecting and improving our economy.

To raise the money to grow and support a university campus, we need community investment on a broader scale. Tax incentives, tax rebates, improvement-cost-credits, and the like that have been the backbone of our economic development efforts to date are worthless for a university project. That is...the work we face of growing a university business capable of a \$150 million per year economic impact on Havasu. That is, **IF** we can grow enrollment to 6,000 students and beyond. This work will require bricks and mortar...new buildings for classrooms and labs.

Mayor Nexsen had it right; "***This may very well be the largest economic development project in our history.***" Our challenge is to do something with it.

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Now, do something with it! #5

Yesterday, I published the fourth of a series of five articles on economic development. All of my articles are on my website, www.billullery.com

So, it takes work and effort to change

During my three terms on the board of directors of the PED, I got quite an education on our town's economic development successes and failures, the low educational attainment of people in our metro area, the advantages of college towns in attracting the most desirable businesses and industries, not to mention the assets we had to offer prospective businesses and new employers.

As we look at our economic situation, we need to know everything about the good and the not so good. Otherwise, we have no way to create a vision for the future and no way to build a roadmap while fixing the pot-holes and road-blocks to get to where we want and need to be.

I believe our negatives are fixable. Our liabilities can become assets. And, I believe hard work never harmed anybody. But, it's doing nothing and negativity that stops progress and stifles achievement. So, we have a bit of work to do.

What do we do next?

Simply work harder to educate our citizens on issues of economic development for our city. Time and time again, cover the progress we've made with the university project and what we need to do to capitalize on its potential. Get everyone possible involved. Talk, write, teach, preach, motivate, organize. We need the same conversations about our lake and lake-shore and a city structure to manage it.

Because of the need to move city government into a major leadership role as a full university partner, we'll need to get political. Because we'll need to vote on a charter.

The 2012 and 2014 election seasons

This election year and for the 2014 cycle, let's make Havasu's economic vision the major issue for candidates and voters. We need to know where our candidates for city and county offices stand on maximizing Havasu's economic potential. Which must include the university campus as well as a re-tooled lake and lake-shore city management structure. If a town-hall type meeting would help, I'll organize one.

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