

Referendums, Like Elections, Have Serious Consequences

Hello Diamondhead Residents and Customers of the Water and Sewer District,

In mid-afternoon Friday two weeks ago, the Mayor and City Council called an impromptu special meeting to approve a “non-binding referendum” on consolidating the Diamondhead Water and Sewer and Fire Districts into the City’s political municipal governance. What’s driving this?

With no prior information to residents, no town halls for citizen input and debate, no independent 3rd party analysis of the “true and significant” financial and operational impacts that would result, what are citizens supposed to be voting on? The financial analysis used to float this referendum was neither independent nor 3rd party. The City chose the District’s prior CPA, one who was not reselected to a subsequent contract term with the District. By no means could this selection be considered neutral. In fact, no credible professional enterprise, public or private, would ever attempt to base an analysis of such consequence with such a deeply conflicted contractor.

In spite of the obvious and apparent defects in this analysis, the City is moving quickly to try and establish early control of the narrative with their first public statement posted on the website on April 6. The innumerable defects in the consolidation analysis will be exposed and we are confident that exposure will become legend. The only question is whether that exposure can/will occur pre, or post leading the community down an irreversible path of regret.

Right out of the gate, it is grossly irresponsible to set the false pretense that either the Water and Sewer or Fire Districts are doing anything but controlling costs. It is equally irresponsible to play this like a board game by suggesting that all you have to do is gut key technical management and financial staff and transfer the remaining employees into an inferior benefits package as a means of cost control. This is but one of a number of questionable foundations to the analysis that should make every resident angry.

Residents, maintaining the highly sought after technically certified personnel required to administer the Water and Sewer and Fire systems is a daunting task in today’s depleted technical employment market. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that our, “your” key employees are already being solicited by regional service districts. Why not, they labor greatly to staff their operations. This is not a game and you need to be deeply concerned.

Referendums certainly have the potential to have serious impacts, and their consequences fall on the residents governed by their reach. They are certainly not new. Local governments routinely use “Non-binding Referendums” for often confusingly difficult things that need the appearance rather than reality of a citizen mandate to undertake. Too often they involve a low turnout and a slim majority polling that is inevitably used by the proponent to declare a “mandate” to move forward. The point is that an under-informed polling referendum will not produce, with integrity, an actionable result.

Let’s be clear, we are absolutely guilty of applying all of our attention to keeping your services operating to the highest standard and lowest cost possible. The result is that we have been woefully lax in properly communicating the why, where, and how we are providing these services. Consequently, in a concerted effort to help safeguard our customers from walking blindly into the polling booth, we are instituting a targeted information campaign to shine as

much light as possible on what this should mean to you, both the pros and the cons. To assist in bringing organization to what is going to be a great deal of information, we have developed the following (8) subject outline that we are confident will give significantly greater foundation for an informed vote on this critical topic.

Referendum Communications Plan – Scheduled Posts:

Referendums, Like Elections, Have Serious Consequences - (April 12, 2021)

Foundational Primer: Your Diamondhead Water & Sewer District's Development History & Status - (April 19, 2021)

Pure, Clean, Healthy Drinking Water Delivery & Sewage Removal & Treatment, How is it Done? Your District's Water & Sanitary Sewer System 101 – (April 26, 2021)

The Pressures of Competing Priorities: 50 Year Old Infrastructure Rehabilitation vs. Rising Demands of Hyper Growth – (May 3, 2021)-

Where Does My Home Fit in the Rehabilitation Plans & Schedules?

(Note: This post will include an annotated Districtwide Basin Map) – (May 10, 2021)

With so Much to Maintain, and Rehabilitate, and Increase to Meet Growth, How Is All of Our Critical District Water & Sewer Infrastructure Financed? – (May 17, 2021)

Water & Sewer District Alignment, Management, & Operations – Consolidation Pros & Cons – (May 24, 2021)

Reminder, the Election is in One Week and Now We Know Referendums Can Have Irreversible Consequences. "Let's All Get Out and Cast an Informed Vote" - (May 31, 2021)

In closing this first post, the Diamondhead Board of Commissioners would most importantly like to thank all of our customers for allowing us to provide you with the best Water and Sewer Services on the Coast and, arguably, the State. Ours is the invisible below ground utility service that you rely on to work flawlessly 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days every year. This to-your-home service is more critical to your overall health and longevity than any other you receive, by far. There is a very important reference that stands out in the City's April 6 release that needs special understanding as we all prepare for the referendum vote. Specifically:

- “most other cities across America”...in comparative reference to services consolidation.

This is statistically accurate, however, it neglects to inform the reader that the vast majority of residents of these municipalities were never given the option, by referendum or any other means. Stated simply, most were either overtaken or organically developed over time during and after incorporation. Given the politically centered turmoil these communities have subsequently labored through keeping their infrastructure services afloat, it would be illuminating to know how many would have chosen differently today. To help drive this point home, in one of our information posts we will examine exactly why one of our extremely well known, and community prized neighboring municipalities was one of those that chose differently.

Please follow our posts over the next several weeks as we are confident you will learn so much about the structure of your utility. We are also confident that as you become better aware of just how amazingly well it operates in the face of constantly emerging challenges, you will join us in becoming a champion of the system and people that perform these duties on your behalf.

Thank you,
Your Diamondhead Water and Sewer District Board

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