

Our City

Since last December 18th I have met numerous times with various community groups, citizens and representatives of various taxing districts to discuss the potential creation of an Urban Renewal Agency (URAs). Conversations initially began with an understandable degree of skepticism and at times complete disagreement with the idea; in full disclosure that was my initial reaction as well, having heard stories of failed projects and over use of the Agency. However, the more I have learned about how URAs are supposed to work when used correctly, as directed by State law, the more viability I see in it as a tool that could potentially be used by the City should the right developer and project come along.

The URA is not a multi-tool or Swiss Army Knife, it is more like a #2 Phillips head Screw Driver – it has a very specific fit and purpose; and while I have seen it used as a hammer and pry bar that is not the intended use of a #2 Phillips head Screw Driver. The operator, in this case the City, needs to know how and when to use the URA tool as defined by statute, common sense and good judgement.

To make the URA a usable tool requires two votes. To create the Urban Renewal Agency requires a majority vote of the City Council; but the creation of the URA does not come with any authority; it is still not a tool that can be used. No, that authority must come from a vote of the citizens of American Falls. A vote that must garner a majority of the votes affirming that the URA tool could in the right cases be used. In a discussion during the March 4th City Council meeting the Council placed a possible action item on the agenda for March 18th. That potential action item is a resolution that if passed would create an Urban Renewal Agency.

If created by the Council I see the composition and the initial terms of the commissioners serving on the Urban Renewal Agency Board as depicted below. As Mayor I would appoint the commissioners and the Council would vote to approve them or not. City representation on the Board has to be less than a majority as stipulated by statute. Terms on the Board would be four years.

Mayor:	January 2022 - Next election date November 2021
Council Person #1:	January 2022 - Next election date November 2021
Council Person #2:	January 2024 - Next election date November 2023
County Commissioner:	January 2025
Other Taxing District Representative	January 2023
At Large #1	January 2024
At Large #2	January 2023
At Large #3	January 2025
At Large #4	January 2021

Should the City Council create the URA and the citizens of American Falls vote to give the Agency the authority to vet potential projects, I see that vetting process looking something like this:

The Board of Commissioners receive and review projects that the majority of the Board believe to be a good fit for our community. Upon receipt of a potential project a preliminary study of

the proposal is reviewed by the Board to determine its initial fit and viability. Should the proposal garner the support of the Board a motion may be made and passed by a majority vote to present the preliminary proposal to the City Council. At such time the City Council may grant the authority by a majority vote to proceed with further development of the proposal. Should the proposal receive the necessary vote from the City Council it will then be sent back to the Board and Project Developer for the determination of actual costs and benefits of the project and whether or not it will meet the increment threshold for sustained renewal, economic impact or growth. Should the proposal proceed beyond this point it will then be presented to the City's and or County's Planning and Zoning authorities for their consideration and vote (any discrepancies within the planning and zoning codes must be resolved at this point) note: the P&Z process may include a public hearing. At such time as the proposed project receives a favorable review and vote from the requisite Planning and Zoning authorities it may then be brought back to the City Council by the Board and Project Developer for the Council's final consideration, note: the Council may include a public hearing. The proposed project can only proceed beyond this point by a majority vote of the City Council. At any point within this entire process the Board and or City Council has the authority to terminate the further development of a project should it prove not to be a right and viable fit for the community.

I am a firm believer in using the right tool for the job. And, while you may seldom use a tool the right tool is sure handy when you need it. The City can't go down to ACE Hardware and buy this one though, that will ultimately require your vote.

In closing I would be remiss in not sharing my sincerest sympathy and condolences to the families of Josi Grover and retired Fire Chief Pete Williams. Josi was gone way too soon from this world and Chief Williams dedicated his life to serving the public good and safety. They will both be fondly remembered and missed. God speed Josi and Pete, rest in peace.

Until next week...