

Four commissions may be consolidated

Some groups have little to do

By Bob Burns
Times Reporter

Community Services Director Mark Mayer is asking the Town Council to consolidate four advisory commissions into a single unit.

The item was on the agenda for discussion at a Jan. 8 planning retreat.

Mayer said town cut-backs through the recession have left his department without the resources to

support four separate advisory groups.

He is asking that the Parks and Recreation, McDowell Mountain Preservation, Senior Services and Community Center advisory commissions be reduced to a single nine-member board.

Mayer is proposing a model that includes four at-large commissioners, one youth commissioner, two representing the senior services group and two

from the Sonoran Conservancy of Fountain Hills.

Currently only the Parks and Recreation Commission has a youth commissioner.

Mayer said he believes this is a broader group that would provide more diverse points of view regarding issues being considered by the commission.

According to Mayer, staff currently spends about 1,500 hours a year tending to the needs of the commissions, the equivalent of an employee working 30 hours per week.

The staff time includes recruitment, orientation, meetings, agenda preparation, minutes and other associated tasks.

"Combining the commissions would cut that time in half or less and allow the newly-restructured commission to be more effective and productive in its advisory capacity," Mayer said in a memo to the council.

Mayor Linda Kavanagh is supportive of change. She said some commission members have mentioned to her they feel they have nothing to do.

"I feel this would provide a broader agenda and encourage participation," Kavanagh said.

Mayer said over the past year the commissions have produced little in the way of advisory material, and some was redundant between groups.

Vice Mayor Cassie Hansen said she would like to have each commission address the consolidation issue separately so the council can hear a focused reaction.

Hansen said she agrees there is a considerable amount of staff time devoted for little return.

Councilman Henry Leger asked Mayer whether staff had looked at other ways to address efficiency issues.

"This sounds like an administrative or management concern," Leger said. "I like to have the citizen participation."

"Maybe you could look at this incrementally going from four groups to two

rather than one. I think there is value in having more citizens involved."

Leger did agree that what Mayer is proposing is a good operational model for an advisory board.

Leger also said he would like to see participation of the existing commissions in any transition.

"I want to see involvement from the commissions in a redesign," Leger said. "At least bring in the four chairs. This is a huge change."

Staff agreed to put together a work-study session for the council that included the four commission chairpersons. None was present at the retreat session.

Ranching in McDowells is Activity Center topic

The program "Ranching in the McDowells" will be presented by the Senior Activity Center on Thursday, Jan. 30, from 2 to 3 p.m.

Ranching was the primary economic activity in and around the McDowell Mountains for about 80 years. This business required toughness, ingenuity and an intimate knowledge of cattle and the land.

The men and women who succeeded as ranchers were industrious and often colorful - American originals. Irish immigrants, women ranch owners, Mexican ranch hands, liquor magnates, and low-flying aircraft loaded with lawyers are all part of the McDowell Mountains' ranching saga.

This ain't no Roy Rogers movie. Hitch up yer Levi's, pull up yer boots, and mosey over to the Community Center to learn about authentic ranching history.

Leonard Marcisz is the program presenter. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Arizona Historical Society, a state chartered body that oversees 16 museums and historic properties in Arizona.

The society also certifies 75 museums throughout the state for compliance with state museum standards. Marcisz has also served as vice chairman of the city of Scottsdale's

Historic Preservation Commission.

He served on the Board of Directors of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy from 2005-2011, and is a former chairman of the board.

He is also a contributing author for the Field Guide to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. His articles regarding the history of the McDowell Mountains have appeared in several local periodicals. He is the scriptwriter and narrator for the Scottsdale City Cable Channel 11 historical series, "Scottsdale Yesterdays."

This program is free for 2014 Activity Center members. There is a \$5 fee for non-members. Preregistration is required. Refer to course #523 when registering.

For more information contact the Fountain Hills Activity Center at 480-816-5226 or visit the town website at www.fh.az.gov.



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For more information, contact Sonoran Lifestyle Real Estate at 480-816-5557.



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January 31, 2014

Choose ONE of the following questions. Please limit essay to 750 words or less.

- 1) What concerns you most when you think about your generation, and what do you believe can be done about those concerns?
- 2) Consider lessons you have learned from your parents, your teachers, your peers and other influences. How have you been empowered to deal with peer pressure? What strategies do you use? How can your experience empower other teens?
- 3) Think about a teacher or other adult who has had a positive impact on your life. What attributes did that person possess that contributed to that impact, and how have you changed as a result of that influence?

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