22nd KZGN News Talking Points Editorial

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By: Tom Wiknich

Today’s topic will be: What do you think about median art on China Lake Blvd?

But first, a couple responses on the KZGN TV News discussion Facebook group about my editorial last Thursday titled: “Sheriff suggests he wants to close the Ridgecrest jail”.

Skip wrote, “Tom, I agree with you on this issue. You stated it well and you do speak from experience. I think Sheriff Youngblood (and Supervisor Gleason for not immediately speaking up against this) have made a fatal error.”

Suzzy wrote, “I read that Supervisor Gleason never heard about this until he received a phone call from constituents, which isn’t right. He should have been informed when Chief Strand was.”

Skip and Suzzy, I agree with both of you. The impacts of closing the sheriff-run jail within the city of Ridgecrest, with the expectation that it is ok to make his deputies and the Ridgecrest police officers drive 2 hour round trips taking prisoners to the Mojave jail is wrong. This puts Kern County’s 3rd largest city at risk of further crime, and longer response time for officers. Don’t forget, the city of Ridgecrest does pay the county about $300,000 a year specifically for jail services. Thanks for your comments.

Now on to today’s editorial: What do you think about median art on China Lake Blvd? Earlier this evening, I did a news story concerning the proposed idea of placing median art in the medians of North China Lake Blvd. It is suggested that there be statues of petroglyphs placed in the medians. This is all in support of the effort to establishing the city of Ridgecrest brand as the petroglyph capitol of the world. This is a distinction I completely support. The idea of placement of the art in the medians is probably a great idea, as well. But as in almost every idea, there is a cost. The supporters of this idea are suggesting that the city fund it with the use of tot funds. Tot funds are a tax the city charges on all visitors that stay in our hotels and motels. It is a transit occupancy tax. The city gets over $1 million dollars per year in tot funds. The city can spend these tax dollars any way they decide.

In past years some of the funds have been used to fund some tourist-related promotion expenses. The Ridgecrest Area Convention and Visitors Bureau have been funded with some of these funds, as well.

Let’s discuss this median art. One supporter said that he has received an estimate of stone sculptures to cost about $5,000 each. And he has proposed 18 of the statues that would cost an estimated $90,000.

It is kind of strange that he asked for and got an estimate for 25 statues, but is only recommending 18 statues.

There would be 17 on North China Lake Blvd and one on East Ridgecrest Blvd. Some people are saying it should be donated funds to buy them. And then others believe it should be a public/private partnership. I think the idea of a public/private partnership should be the solution.

I believe it should be the businesses that receive the most benefit from these tourist generating events. The motels benefit the most with sold out rooms. And restaurants and gas station are next on the list of most likely benefactors of the added visitors to the city.

I believe it’s time that these hotels and motels step up to the plate and help fund these types of ideas. Or is it that they feel that since the tot is a gain, that the city should pay it all. Well, I want to remind the hotels and motels, the tot doesn’t come out of your pocket. It comes out of your guests’ pocket first, then the city’s pocket. Do I think the city shouldn’t help at all? No, I don’t. I do not believe the cost should fall totally on the city.

In conclusion, I think adding the statues would be nice, but I believe the cost should be carried mostly by the benefactors of increased tourism and partially by the city. Maybe a 75/25 split, with the city at the 25% portion. The city has so many other demands on their tax revenue, that this type expenditure should be closely watched. We could also even entertain local groups that want to help. I know as a local business owner, I’m asked every day to donate to one cause or another, and I’m just a small business that donates thousands back into the community every year. I say it’s time for these big corporations to also step up and put money back into the community.

And that’s today editorial. Tell me what you think! Whether you agree with me or not, I’d like to read your comments. I encourage your email comments. Please email them to info@kzgn.net. This has been a KZGN Talking Points Editorial. Join me Thursday for my next editorial. Thanks for watching. I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think!