32nd KZGN News Talking Points Editorial

The topic of today’s editorial is: Continued discussion of communications with the council

But first, let’s cover all the comments we received on last Tuesday’s editorial. The topic was: Back and forth discussions between the people and the new council is now slipping away.

All I can say is wow! I want to start this by saying that one of the comments received was right from Mayor Breeden, who quickly acknowledged the point of my editorial. While others wanted to go a whole different direction with it, discussing the content of a person’s comments, which inspired very rough discussion. My editorial was about the process and had nothing to do with the actual persons comments. But some wanted to not discuss the process but the comments.

Here is Mayor Breeden’s response as to the actual topic of my editorial, “My apology to all. I will do my level best not to respond like that again. After the discussions, decisions and positions and after we listen to all. If you agree or disagree please let us know.

My apology. It is done and over for me. Thank you all for listening.” I want to thank her for the response, and I do believe she will do what she has promised.

As an olive branch to the council, I want to acknowledge that I do know what it’s like to sit up there and have someone say something that gets under your skin. I’ve been there, and I’ve had it happened many times to me too. I, too, made the mistake I’m now taking you to task on. The reason is because when I was on the council and did exactly what I’m editorializing about now, I was reprimanded by members of the public for doing it, and not providing an open back and forth discussion. They criticized me for not giving them the opportunity to answer my comments. I realized they were right. If I had a comment that was going to be directed to them, then I should do it when they have the opportunity to discuss. Not after they were sitting down and public comment was closed.

Now let’s move on to the responses to the editorial that were pertaining to the actual topic: the process. Ray asked more than once, “Will KZGN broadcast viewer's responses to editorials?” Ray, I have always been covering responses to our stories and editorial. Good or bad, I include them.

Note: I am going to share responses that were only about the topic. I will not provide any personal attack comments. The problem was that I defended a citizen’s right to speak their mind at a council meeting, and encouraged the council to respond to the person when they are at the podium so a meaningful back and forth discussion could be accomplished.

What happened was that some people wanted to take the discussion to the subject of the comments made that made the council respond. I thought I made it clear in my editorial my comments were directed at the process, not the actual comments made. I think in the editorial I said it at least 3 or 4 times. My comments are about the process, not the subject of the comments made by people.

Now here are comments. Please note that comments were very long by many, so I’m only going to include relevant comments to the topic. Skip said, “Tom, I for one may not be interested in engaging some loudmouth bomb-thrower in a conversation from the dais.” And Skip was adamant that he felt it was ok for the council to not engage certain people at the podium because of what they say. Sharon said, “The 1st amendment does not give members of the public a free pass to be disruptive or prevent the conduct of business during the council meetings. The behavior in the city council meetings goes both ways.....if members of the public expect respect and cooperation then they need to also be mindful of their behavior.” Robert provided the following quote, “When a member of the public testifies before a legislative body, the body may not prohibit the individual from criticizing the policies, procedures, programs or services of the agency or the acts or omissions of the legislative body.” Sharon responded, “The public participation in meetings, in addition to requiring the public’s business to be conducted in open, noticed meetings, the Brown Act also extends to the public the right to participate in meetings. Individuals, lobbyists, and members of the news media possess the right to attend, record, broadcast, and participate in public meetings.” Robert responded, “Completely agree, Sharon. My point was that the business of the counsel is the public's business. We have had time rules and topic rules for a long time. It is up to the counsel to enforce these rules.” Dan wrote, “It’s clear that some members of the council rather than engage the person they disagree with openly, they wait until it’s a ‘protected time’ and no public response is possible.” Robert added, “First of all Skip, I do not represent Tom, nor KZGN when I make comments to the council. I am speaking for myself just as you might do.” Skip wrote back, Robert, I have refrained from speaking at the dais (podium) since being given a public venue by the DI from which to offer my opinion. It is respecting the extent to which folks could easily infer that my opinions are perhaps also those of the DI. No problem. When I have something to say I’ll write it. Sharon added, “When a citizen decides to use the public meetings of the city council as their own bully pulpit, then they have to accept the fact that the council may make comments later in the meeting or at another meeting that address the individual's comments.” Ethan responded, “I would disagree with that theory.” Ray said, “I agree with you, Sharon.”  Ethan then said, “It is our right and our duty to question our elected leaders.”

Ethan - yes it is the right of the citizens to have an opportunity to speak at public meetings. It is also not the right of citizens to hijack public meetings, try to move the meeting discussion off the items on the agenda or to demand equal time at the meeting. Then Shannon provided the following, “Most of those speaking at public comment are respectful and ask good questions. I do not see most of them being disruptive. In fact most ask very good questions and are very polite.” Then Ken said, “That is of course true. But then there are the obnoxious blowhards who fall outside the ‘most’ category and get all the attention. Even for people who might agree with them, it can be difficult sometimes to get past the messenger.” Then Ray added, “Kenneth, that is so true. I even remember a former mayor from many years ago who, after becoming a ‘regular’ citizen, yelled at the council during one meeting. His arrogance was out there for all to see.” And the last comment received prior to writing this script was from Ethan, “However, the fact that this is the united states of America where protesting perceived government overreach is inherently in our blood, I will continue to support and cherish a citizen’s right to object in the face of perceived tyranny. Now before you jump all over me it is important to note that I am not necessarily supporting the content of the his speech, but I am supporting his right to address his elected representative in the harshest tone he feels necessary to get his point across.”

It did inspire some good discussion. I have to say that I had to try and just pull the meat of most comments, as most were very long and lengthy. Most were comments I could agree with. Again, I want this clear, what I shared today were comments that addressed the topic of my editorial, not the subject matter of comments from a person at a council meeting.

Now today’s editorial topic: Continued discussion of communications with the council

All I care to add is that communication is defined as someone speaking, and someone listening. This is fair communication. It should be respectful and pertaining to the topic at hand. No one should be subjected to verbal abuse, whether it is a result of their elected office, or being a member of the public. Like I said last week, many times a person’s comments are misunderstood. By the council and the member of the public discussing together at the same time, a better understanding is logical.

I want to thank everyone that participated in the KZGN News discussion item on Facebook.

My wife Shannon, is the site administrator and makes sure all comments are on subject and polite. No profanity or personal attacks, or defaming comments, are permitted.

As former Mayor Clark always said, Be hard on the issue, but respectful of the person.

In conclusion, I believe Mayor Breeden has put the issue to bed. She said that she would work very hard to make sure that dialog between the council and the public is conducive to a good discussion of the topics. That’s good enough for me.

I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think. If you have any comments about this editorial, or would like to discuss or recommend a topic, I’d like to hear from you. Please email them to info@kzgn.net.