



TOWN OF FOUNTAIN HILLS

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News Release

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2019 State of The Town: Mayor Ginny Dickey Fountain Hills Community Center

Welcome to the 2019 State of the Town. If that date resonates, it's because we became an incorporated municipality in 1989, so this is the year to celebrate our 30th Birthday!

We are very grateful to the Chamber and all the organizers, generous sponsors, Town and Community Center staff, and all of you for coming to this sold out breakfast, and those who are watching live now or will be later online and Ch 11.

They say there is nothing new under the sun. In fact, I was having this discussion with a good friend the other day as we discussed births and losses in our families, our ever-increasing aches and pains, weddings and trips and hockey games. We finally joked that what we were talking about wasn't unique... our parents and other generations had all been through this... hence nothing new under the sun.

But there was a second part to that... it is new – to us!

Have you ever seen the 80's musical "Starlight Express?" It played in Vegas, 6 days a week, sometimes twice a day... on roller skates! It was quite a spectacle. The athleticism, singing, and pure energy was exhausting – just to watch. But that cast treated every audience as if it was the first time they experienced it... because it was!

That's how your Mayor and Council feel... that we owe you our best, every time. Whether you've been in FH for 35 years or longer, like my family, or yet to experience your first Arizona summer, you deserve a beautiful, safe and well-managed community, with fun activities and joyful experiences that make life-long memories.

When we faced shortfalls in the School District in the 90's, as a parent and Board Member I never wanted these 4th graders to be the ones with no art or field trips, or to get home from school in the dark because of double sessions. They deserved our best. This was their only chance to be in 4th grade.

So, you see where I'm going. We have choices to make, **TOGETHER.**

Some of us on Council are only about a month in, yet we have been learning and meeting with staff, commissioners, businesses, utilities, groups and individuals almost since the election last August. Our more established Members have been seeking input, too, as always.

I asked my new colleagues last fall what some of their priorities are so I could share today. They include:

Building up citizen trust so that as decisions are made and ideas take shape, residents will engage and assist in exploring them. Public involvement and transparency on the part of the Council and staff will help bolster confidence as we look to 2020 and beyond with an updated voter-approved General Plan and a desire to maintain a high quality of life.

Another was about making sound choices around future funding as we try to balance unpredictable revenue sources with ongoing needs.

Public safety and all that entails was a strong priority for some Council Members. Perhaps adding to our already robust law enforcement partnerships with education and groups such as the Coalition we could hold events and communicate information focused on topics such as domestic violence, substance abuse... especially opioids... recovery and suicide, with an available-resources component. Our Prosecutor Mark Iacovino prepared a report with important local data on these and other issues.

Council is aware that the unusual number of serious incidents has raised concern. While some are certainly aberrations, others, such as texting and driving, pedestrian and intersection accidents and speeding, indicate a closer look.

Members suggest they want to work even more with our professional MCSO officers to talk about tailoring services to local input, such as community policing, which has already been increasing. There is some frustration about how crimes are reported. In my opinion, though, and I will bring this up later, social media and 24-hour news has perhaps turned us a bit into an impatient society, somewhat willing to accept quick, even if not entirely, accurate, "breaking news." We recognize the public's right to know, and how that gets reconciled with ongoing investigations and incomplete facts is something to work on... again, together.

Other Council intentions include specializing their efforts in areas of expertise or interest... you may have seen at the December meeting Members volunteering to serve on committees and commissions that give us regional exposure, influence and educational and business growth opportunities... and locally as well, including positions in the many clubs, churches and other groups that serve FH.

I feel lucky as a Mayor and resident to have this Council with such a variety of experiences and viewpoints. For many years the license plate on my car said H-A-R-M-O-N-Y, harmony, and it's not just about singing alto at the theater! It's about balance and figuring things out as a team--what the majority of the community wants, and will support, and how that fits with our most basic needs. Opinions will vary about how much or how little government should do for a community. The framework was put in place for the formation of municipalities, with access to safety and infrastructure, education, businesses and amenities that reflect the "pursuit of happiness" for ideally the most citizens.

So, let's talk about some of the things we've learned... and then show the video about what our Town has been working on and plans for the future.

Let me just say there have been wonderful ideas and offers to help. For example, the Leadership Academy graduates presented their very relevant projects; Strategic Planning Commissioners volunteer many hours for us so the Vision/FH effort working through FHCCA can take the data and come up with common goals for implementation.

Real estate professionals have been a great source of insight. They can act as the first line of economic development for the Town. This has been something I had advocated for. They literally bring people and families to FH. Population is the key to many of the issues we care about.

Meanwhile, our business community, which the Chamber represents, continues to promote Fountain Hills as a place to work, recreate, and dine for all of the right reasons! Fountain Hills offers much to enjoy. Placing an emphasis on employment opportunities, excellent services, and a variety of available commercial space is important to our growth and viability. Although we may not be able to compete with cities 5 or 10 times our size in some ways, our strategic location, incredible views, and safe, small-town atmosphere provide a special kind of business opportunity, including home-based, unmatched in the Valley. Recruiting businesses that share those values and providing a sustainable environment for them to succeed is an important goal for us.

Residents have ideas about budget assistance, creating walkable, accessible neighborhoods, and an entertainment district, more events, health and well-being pursuits, nature and the environment, grant-writing, quality Wi-Fi and cellular infrastructure, and teen and aquatic amenities. Someone wrote, "Senior Services, the Community Center and all our programs are vital to our community. The Center is an active, important part of this beautiful Town." They recognize the "Starlight Express" philosophy.

Residents also have researched issues such as school security, citing reports and plans of action some of which our District has already implemented. They looked at other cities and how empty storefronts, housing costs, attracting younger residents and short-term rentals may be addressed, and bringing successful ideas to FH.

These offers are genuine and from people who have the knowledge and experience to make things happen. Harnessing the talent of volunteers will be a fulfilling and ongoing priority. We are counting on their help... as we have so gratefully all along.

In addition, we count on our governmental and service partners as we develop give and take relationships that benefit us all. The Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation and Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Communities offer much help and support, particularly in the area of tourism and education.

Speaking of, the FHUSD, EVIT, Charter, private and home schools are literally our future. Their success is our success and exploring more ways to expand and tell our stories can prove an economic engine for our Town and again, attract younger families.

We have recently seen first-hand the advantage of working closely with the Sanitary District as they improve their infrastructure... and ours... at the Park. Water is a #1 issue in 2019 and the District, EPCOR and SRP are an integral part of that conversation. They, along with communication companies

and Republic/Allied Waste, as our utilities, are so intertwined with our everyday life that maintaining strong, good faith relationships are key to our businesses and residents.

Now, let's watch the video, so you can know our staff as each explains their departments' functions and actions over the last year.....

(To see the accompanying video, go to: <https://youtu.be/6-00tAKjp-l>)

Thank you to Town Manager Grady Miller and directors for indulging me by "starring" in the video! And to Mike Ciccarone, Nancy Walter, Liz Burke and everyone who contributed to it with content and organizing... and being good sports!

So, what should YOU expect? I'm thinking of 2 -isms... realism and optimism.

Realism first:

At the Council Retreat on 2/7, you will see a serious honest assessment of our Town, with discussion and recommendations in the coming months while working toward a budget that tackles capital and operating needs, including staffing.

There will be a streets action plan directing us to take our fiduciary responsibility and protect these public assets. By us, I mean all of us.

Now and over the next couple of years we have to talk about *realistic* revenue options. We do have positive news... it appears Arizona's economy is in good shape which should make our shared revenue distribution healthier. There is a lag time, but our finance staff will take that into consideration as we look to the future. The State will be cautious as much of this surplus will be considered one-time funding and, therefore, likely won't want to start much that generates ongoing costs. But it is an encouraging sign that will complement our local economic strength.

Similarly, we need to weigh our decisions... again balance comes into play. How do the things we want fit in with expenses like re-painting and re-carpeting buildings, repairing roads, replacing vehicles and public safety priorities? You understand this. Anyone who comes to retreats, attends budget sessions or has been following us knows it's beyond capital needs. We can argue those capital dollar amounts and how to raise them, what projects can be deferred, but it's hard to discount the shortage in our operating budget.

Relying on the good hearts and dedication of staff to continue to perform more than one full-time job, or on professional retirees literally volunteering their services, is not sound business practice.

We've been finding it difficult to fill some positions, and there are more vacancies on the horizon. Our HR professional is also doing a completely unrelated job. Our streets department relies on one person to be on call 24-7 too much of the time.

The outcome of staffing issues is that it affects your quality of life, from little annoyances like a phone that is unanswered to a business adversely impacted by licensing or permitting delays. Weeds, medians and washes can't be tended to enough... code enforcement in general is lacking. The walkway around the Lake can only be power-washed just so often. A storm caused damage that used up the Environmental Fee Fund... which as it is covers just half the annual routine associated costs.

Comprehensive economic development takes time to come to fruition but with resources needed immediately.

Back to giving our residents the best home town experiences we can... the events that make us special are on the table, too. For example, it looks like we will have no choice but to go to every other year for Ballet AZ. The same donors, businesses and organizations are asked to help with all these fun events. We who love to attend are very grateful but recognize that without more Town support the activity level may not be sustainable.

I mentioned earlier social media and impatience: if something you read or hear seems not quite right, investigate, wait for more information, or ask the source directly. Being misunderstood or unheard can be discouraging for all of us. Let's give each other a break. We don't know what people are going through. I think we can agree that some ideals are universal... we all wish for shared success... and many of us are willing to get on board and help.

Realism and optimism can coexist.

Now Optimism – it comes from confidence and trust:

Join us...

- As we continue to work for future economic development and growth with the Chamber and more.
- As we serve our residents and businesses by keeping our neighborhoods safe and well-maintained.
- As we protect our public assets, amazing views and outdoor life.
- As we look to education and housing, activities and amenities to attract new residents and visitors; and
- As we re-think conventional strategies, look to our community resources... our people... and present a welcoming, thriving home Town.

I was honored to attend opening day at the Legislature. It was full of excitement and anticipation... like when a game starts 0-0, a clean slate... where calls for bipartisan cooperation brings hope and enthusiasm. I was able to talk with people there, advocating for local causes along with professional organizations that represent municipalities like the League of Arizona Cities and Towns, Maricopa Association of Governments, the Greater Phoenix Economic Council and Valley Metro.

Recently, new US Senator Martha McSally reached out and met with a few East Valley Mayors seeking our input! She is talking to cities and towns all over AZ. I am sensing a desire on many levels to accomplish goals together.

It struck me back in 1984 while attending the first FH planning session how clearly the participants wanted to move in a direction that was resident-centric... strongly committed to the people who chose to live here... and to preserving our unique community.

Over 30 years later, I firmly believe that a majority of citizens still agree with the stated goals articulated over and over through the Strategic Plan, Vision/FH and those many years of surveys and Town Halls... they value our natural environment and views, schools, safe neighborhoods, outdoor life and small-town charm. This does not contradict supporting growth. In fact, it complements it. It is business-friendly to supply customers... residents and visitors who want to be here. In fact, with 23%

of the population interested in living in a small town, only 13% have the privilege of waking up in a place like FH every day.

Anyone who has seen the stunning scenic pictures taken by our exceptional local photographers would have to agree there is plenty new under the Fountain Hills sun. As we move toward celebrating the 30th anniversary of incorporation and 50th anniversary of the Fountain, let's do what we can together to keep our Town as special and exciting to our brand new neighbors as it was for the adventurous ones who chose FH many years ago. We owe them all our best.

To continue the conversation, we are aiming for another Town Talk Tuesday on 2/26 @ 6:30 PM here at the Community Center with some Council members alternately hosting with me. And the retreat on 2/7 is also here starting at 9 AM.

I want to thank Council Members Brown, Leckrone, Magazine, Scharnow, Spelich and Tolis for their time, talents and commitment to FH.

I will be around to talk after; THANK YOU all for being here today!

Now back to the Chamber for some business and their closing remarks.