

Town Comments: What is the State of Springdale 2022? Comments by Betina Lindsey

June 8, 2022

On today's agenda is the cost of living 8 per cent raise for Springdale public officials. I understand that the agenda item regarding a cost of living adjustment is not for town staff but for public officials. That would be the Mayor, Council Members, and the Planning Commissioners. Council members receive \$6,000 per year, and Planning Commissions receive \$4,800 per year. In these challenging times I feel these public officials earn the 8 per cent raise and appreciation of our community. So, I as a voting resident give my approval to a cost of living raise.

However, I, with others, looked into the growth of the town staff numbers in recent years and pay scale with some surprise. Though I have lived here thirty years, it has happened fast, mainly in the last ten years. Most of our staff does not live in Springdale because of housing restraints and seemingly those applicants' best for the positions live elsewhere. Our hired employees come by required postings and apparently word of mouth to family and friends. Luckily, at least the Mayor, Council and Planning Commissioners live in Springdale.

Why is Springdale Town Staff included in the highest 400 paid municipalities in the nation? The answer is the consequences of over tourism. Once you turn your town over to the tourism industry, the locals, the eco system and town atmosphere become monetized. So tourism has made us a rich town, a rich county and a rich state. Yet, it becomes too much of a good thing. No one knows when to stop. More, More, More. This is mainly because Springdale has stumbled forward into a Zion Nature Disneyland. Our town manager is the CEO and justifiably compensated as one. It is like living in the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, renamed Zion Forever or better said "Pirates of Zion Forever". However, it is more fun to visit Zion Forever World than permanently live and work here.

Has our town management address over tourism? Yes and no. It has had no choice but to accommodate it. Questions to ask: What is sustainable and unsustainable tourism? What and who takes priority in Springdale as the host community? The permanent residents (no), the developers (yes), the businesses (yes), the visitors (yes), the tourism industry (yes)? The environment (sadly, no)? How do you control a state/tax industry that skims & directs profits to the regeneration of more tourism and infrastructure for more tourism? Transient Room Tax exploded last year because hotels in town and state have raised prices. Will it go to workers? No, it will go to more perpetuation of infrastructure salaried jobs to promote more tourism.

A "Right to Work State", Utah SERVICE WORKERS rarely have benefits, unless employed by corporations and governmental entities. Over tourism leaves the SERVICE WORKERS, exhausted from cleaning hotel rooms, accommodating tourists and feeding the 6 million. What is a living wage for the service worker to secure affordable housing in Springdale? Answer: A rich town has nothing affordable an hourly worker's pay check can afford, especially housing. If you are young and living in group housing its ok, but not forever. Ask town employers about the difficulty of finding reliable employees at the going wage?

You can ask, what is the state of Springdale with its tons of litter, natural disasters of flooding, falling rocks, water waste and 6 million tourists a year? The locals are becoming paranoid, calling for policing. Rightly, some call the police when a strange car parks or camps on their street. (6 million visitors is a lot)

“Who are these Guys?” Others reflect on how it used to be. Then many begin saying, “I don’t want to live here anymore.” The developers are only too happy to offer amazing sums to assist you on your way.

Yes, I get surface information in the Utility bill, but I would like more transparency monthly to the town policies about the budget and undertakings. What are our policies to sustainability in the face of unbalanced tourism? What is our destination capacity? Is your only solution more Parking, Hotels, more Air & BBs to accommodate? How does our town resolve our town problems from TRT tax money allocation, to daily policing, to the need of a new town clinic, to the water district’s plan in time of drought? We know the high water users are the hotels. Are 12 million toilet flushes or more a year too much for the Virgin River?

Rumors spread in a small community when not informed. Are you taking river park green space to erect another building or tourist parking spot? Is it true there is a plan to dredge the Virgin River? Is it true there are plans for a small recreation center or even a new town office? As a community, we seem to be uninformed, apathetic and at the mercy of reckless growth. Please address the town plans for the future in the newsletter. Let us have a dialogue on projects. Announced before rather than when it is a done deal. Does every green space require a new building? If you don’t build it, maybe they won’t come. Maybe we won’t need to hire more town staff , parking attendants or policemen.

After speaking with the Mayor, I realize the circumstance that the town is a structure of government within the state of Utah. Wages and pay scales for Town Staff are determined by the government bureaucracy. Another challenge of Springdale is generating over a two and half million dollar payout yearly for employees. Add a few million more to infrastructure costs which is a far cry from the mobile trailer the town worked out of in the nineties with Faye Cope.

Our National Park Employees, Hotel & Restaurant Workers as well as the Town workers, council, planning commission deserve an endless applause...because their work is endless.

I wish it were different. I wish everyone, young and old, in this town did have a living wage, a place to live, to create equity in a home or condo, as well as an assisted living retirement home and health benefits. Thanks to the county, we still have our elementary school, library and community center combination. I emphasize, if tourism doesn’t work for the locals, it doesn’t work!

Is it a losing battle for the Planning Commission, Mayor and Town Council who are the boundary makers? Yes, it has been a losing battle. They dodge bullets from all sides. There have been failed ordinances. They are barely paid for this endeavor all the while deceived by developers, threatened with lawsuits by individuals “Who want it my way”. Gosh, is there anyone who still wants to protect the Night Sky? Will there be any shops that aren’t renting electric bikes? We all scratch our heads. How did this happen?

Who are the 500 resident voting populace in Springdale? Definitely, among them are full time residents and small business owners that care! They beautify the town with mosaics and win awards, have fundraisers at our school, sponsor gifting funds for those whose health and homes experience tragedy. These residents mourn the deaths of their friends and families. Yet for some, is it time to cash out and leave because the cost of living is too high or can’t pay the rising property tax? Whose fault is it? I say not the Council, Commissioners, or Town Staff. It’s over tourism perpetuated by the advertising agencies of the state. Springdale town officials will receive their eight percent wage increase. They will continue to earn it.

Humans are natural ‘me firsters’. The town is an over tourism gold rush where Greed is Good and the dollar crushes local boundaries. How do we protect Springdale from ourselves and from ‘Tourism Forever’ (fever)? Can we take another tack? I ask the town to start informing with greater transparency the voting population. Gosh, maybe there are a few people in town that want to know Town and Park decisions beyond ordinance changes and building permits. Is it too late? You may say few attend the public council meetings. True. What is the town’s protecting strategy for the locals? Only 2 hours free parking grace a day? Listening to the citizens sometimes brings conflict, but also new points of view. Are we heading to a future where the town won’t have to worry about the voting citizens, because they are an endangered species and there won’t be any?

Post Script: A Jordan Smith is studying the impact of tourism on Utah’s Gateway communities.

How have other small communities handled over tourism?