EVERYTHING IS A BALANCE

Steve Joyce evaluates Council priorities through the lenses of fiscal responsibility and long-term viability

What part of your background most prepared you to serve on City Council?

I would say my business experience. I got my degree from North Carolina State then went to work for IBM. I worked in a number of roles there, including technology, marketing, and business development. And then one day, three friends and I said, "Let's go do something else." So we started a software company that makes network performance management products, and we eventually grew it to 100 people. I learned such valuable life and business skills at both IBM and my own shop. IBM really cared about their employees, and this ethos imbued every aspect of the company. In a small startup, you learn quickly that every minute counts, every dollar counts, every decision counts.

How did you settle in Park City?

After we sold our company, I decided to take a year off (I'm in my 14th year of that year off.) I came to Park City in 2004 to ski, and, like most people, was immediately captivated. Housing prices had fallen after the 2002 Olympics, so my wife Julie and I bought a condo with the intention of having it be a vacation home. But, again, like a lot of people, we decided pretty quickly to live here full-time and sold our home in North Carolina.

What about Park City appealed to you?

We just liked the small-town feel, and—having grown up on the East Coast—loved that it stays cool and dry in the summer. All of Utah—including the national parks in the south—is just so spectacularly beautiful. We were just drawn to it.

You're an integral part of the town's civic fabric now. How did that start?

My wife and I both volunteered a little bit before moving here full-time, including at the National Ability Center and Friends of Animals (I'm proud to say we were very helpful in building the Rescue Ranch in Brown's Canyon). But you can't be involved in any meaningful way if you disappear two-to-three months at a time. So once we were permanently settled, we started looking for ways to have a bigger impact. I applied for some boards and commissions, not worrying about whether I would get rejected. People tend to take being rejected from boards personally, but I would advise it not to get you down: you just need to figure out why you weren't chosen and work on that aspect. I applied to be a Planning Commissioner three times before I was accepted.

Why were you finally accepted?

At that point I was more established in the community and better understood the characteristics of the various neighborhoods. I had gotten involved in Rotary and other civic programs, and had developed a level of trust with my fellow residents.

Why did you decide to run for Council?

Well, it's funny. I was in Leadership Class 18, and at the first meeting, when we went around the room introducing ourselves. I said, "I'm Steve Joyce and I'm going to be mayor." I just knew early on that I could make a difference, and City Council is where you can make the biggest impact. After Mayor Thomas decided not to run again, I flirted with the idea of running for mayor. Thank God I didn't—look at the field we had.

> { "I CARE A LOT ABOUT THIS TOWN, AND I WANT TO ENSURE THAT WE ARE ALWAYS ON FINANCIALLY SOUND FOOTING." }

Roger Armstrong, Dana Williams, and Andy Beerman are three of the most qualified candidates out there. So I ran for a City Council seat and was happy I won, but I will candidly say I was disappointed that we didn't have more competition. With two open seats, we should have had at least six-to-eight candidates. City Council's a very important job: I would encourage everyone who thinks they have something to offer to consider running for something.

What did you learn through campaigning?

Like a lot of people, I'm not fully comfortable campaigning, but it's very important to do because you hear a lot of contrasting opinions. And constituents often expressed opinions about issues outside our jurisdiction, such as what's happening in the school district or the county. I learned pretty quickly that I couldn't just draw a line and say, "This is what I own and this is what I don't." We need to take a regional, cross-jurisdictional approach to our challenges because we are one community in the end.

What other issues require a regional approach?

Transportation and workforce housing are the two big ones. We work pretty well with Summit County on them, and I would like to see us work more closely with Wasatch County, namely Heber and Midway. I know these are thorny issues, but in the end, it's about sitting down and figuring out what each party needs and wants, and what each party can offer. It takes time to build a level of trust, but I'm confident we can find common ground.

You just mentioned two of Park City's three critical priorities—housing and transportation—with the third being carbon reduction. Are we are focusing on the right issues?

I completely agree that transportation and housing meet the criteria for a critical priority, which is defined as an issue whose trajectory will be forever altered for the worse if it does not receive appropriate resources now. I'm a little less sure that that applies to carbon reduction (at least at our municipal level). There's a lot to be said for considering full lifecycle costs when designing buildings, but net-zero buildings are very expensive to build. I understand that part of the power of making net-zero a critical priority is in the example we set for other communities. But it's never cheap to be on the bleeding edge. I still need to get a better understanding of our plans and their impacts.

Do you apply this healthy skepticism to other issues or priorities?

Yes, it ties directly to one of my governing philosophies: fiscal conservatism. I care a lot about this town, and I want to ensure that we are always on financially sound footing. Utah does not allow us to hold a large rainy day operating fund, but we are allowed to bank funds in our capital budgets. Last year, we made many large-scale financial commitments that will affect us for years to come, including Bonanza Flat, the Arts & Culture District, and Lower Park Avenue outlays. We're also looking at another large bond for Treasure Hill. We need to evaluate what these commitments will fully cost both our residents and the city government. Allowing the public to weigh in (for both Bonanza Flat and Treasure Hill through the bond process) is a far better alternative than having City Council give the final say.

I'm also concerned about taking on too much for another purely pragmatic reason: that of workflow. Whenever we add a priority or project or capital improvement, I want to ask what comes off the plate. If this is the most important thing, what isn't? Sure, there will be one-off exceptions, but they should be rare. We should always have the conversation about tradeoffs, for both finances and staff time. I don't have any strong preferences about what we should or shouldn't do—I just want our resources and workflow to always be in balance. You never build a business to peak capacity, and I don't want Park City to overbuild our infrastructure either.

Would you like the Olympics to come back?

I'm not sure yet. Before the 2002 Olympics, Park City wasn't on the map; now we're internationally known. If they did come back, what would we get out of it? We need to consider that before throwing our energy behind a bid.

And we can't really think about the Olympics without thinking about the issue looming large in our collective psyche: climate change. Just look at this winter: what if this is the new normal? We should start developing a climate change-adaptation plan—to gird against both environmental and economic impacts. We need to create a more resilient economy that will buffer us against the downturns of the resort economy, should it come to that.

In the end, I just want to bring it back to balance: let's look at everything collectively to be sure we are making decisions for the long-term, and for the community as a whole.

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