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148th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial

By Tom Wiknich

I don’t understand why people make comments at council meetings, and then leave before they get their questions answered.

Wednesday evening, the city council, once again, held a public discussion on the proposed support agreement for the new Indian casino. I know there is a strong position on both sides of the proposal. During the meeting, I noticed the tolerance level between the sides is getting thin. This is a decision that is rightfully being carried out in the open with public input.

There is one aspect I do not understand. As one who often addresses the council on issues, when I make comment or ask questions, I stay and wait for an answer. If I do not get an answer, I will follow up and ask again. I don’t ask a question and then leave. I don’t drop a “bomb” on the council, and not give them the opportunity to address my comments before I leave. If the topic is important enough for me to ask a question or make comment, I stay and listen and learn from the council. Especially when a person makes comments that appear to be challenging the council, as to whether they are doing their job, the question is completely appropriate. If you question their performance, why not stay and wait for the answer? They usually do answer or provide the basis for their decisions.

Does a person ask a question with their own, already-concluded opinion on the matter, and they are just throwing out a criticism in the form of a question? At the council meeting Wednesday night, the council held a respectful discussion trying to answer the people’s comments and questions. While many people might not have liked the answers, or just don’t believe the answers, the discussion still occurred. Answers were provided. A discussion of a topic takes two sides to listen and discuss. When one side of the discussion leaves, the meaningful exchange is over. Rush Limbaugh used to call it the “drive by media.” A reporter would just drop a story on something, and then run away before giving the intended target of the story a chance to reply.

I’m sure no one intended to be rude or disrespectful, but it’s just that I would stick around for the answer. How else can you learn whether they took into consideration your comment or question? Instead, you go home with a partial conclusion as to what is really happening. Before someone takes me to task that a person might not have time to sit and wait, that could be true. Something could have come up requiring them to leave before getting their answer. I would hope that if that was the case, they would then come back at a subsequent meeting and again ask for their answer. There are often times I don’t agree with a council decision; however, I am constantly on them to communicate with the public and let the public comment, which they do.

However, communication takes two parties. It takes at least two participants: speakers and listeners. They both need to be in the same room at the same time. It is through this process we learn. We get to understand the topic better. We get to hear from the council why they are making the decisions they make. The council has a duty to fully explain their decisions to us. Most of the time, they do answer the questions. If we really care about the topic, we need to be there to listen. If you don’t like their answer, that’s fine. If you don’t believe them, that’s fine too. At least have the respect to stick around and listen. If they don’t answer the way you like, stand up and tell them that. You have the right to disagree, but you have to be there to do that. Effective discussion usually requires at least two parties. If you’re not there to hear their answer, how will you ever know if your question has been answered to your satisfaction?

In conclusion, I would encourage people that have comments or questions for the council, to ask them. I would encourage you to stick around to hear their answer. If they don’t answer, ask it again and ask for the answer. You have to be there to hear their answer and even respond if necessary.

I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think. I’d like to know what you 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.