

'Home rule' vote decides city's financial future

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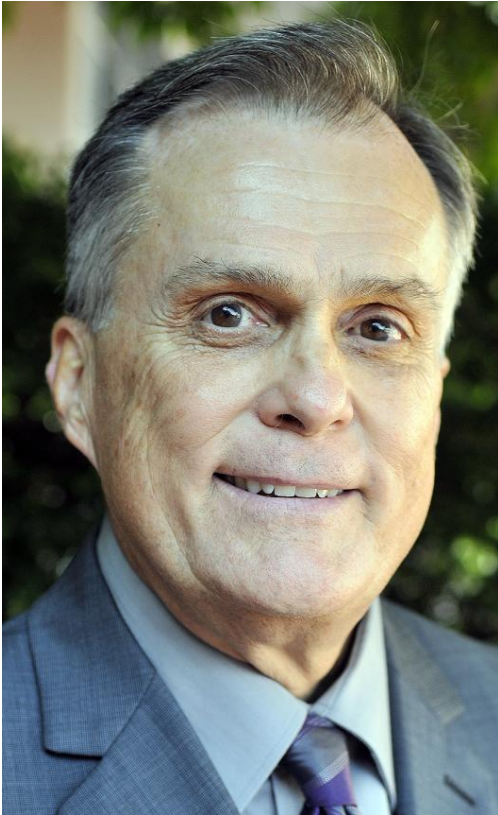
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The city's alternative expenditure limitation, also known as home rule, will go before voters once again during next week's Tuesday, March 13, primary election.

Known as Proposition 420, home rule was placed on the ballot for this year's mail-in election. Voters will also decide three seats for the Sedona City Council during the primary. A general election, if necessary, will be held Tuesday, May 15.

Home rule is put before voters every four years. The home rule option allows cities to set their own fiscal-year budgets rather than letting a general state formula determine the budget. In September, city staff began an education effort to inform voters on the specifics of alternative expenditure limitations before they cast their vote.

Sedona Mayor Rob Adams said he believes the consequences of a state-imposed expenditure limitation will not accomplish anything more than hardship for the city and its residents. Those who would like to see the city spend less annually, he said, should consider the city has already cut spending in the last year by 30 percent.



“If the state-imposed expenditure limitation was actually initiated, we would have to reign it in another 41 percent. Take 71 percent out of any budget, and think about what the outcome will be. It will absolutely hamstring the city from being able to provide even basic services,” Adams said. “The consequences could be eliminating funding for the Sedona [Public] Library, the Humane Society [of Sedona], Sedona Recycles, the

[Sedona] Chamber of Commerce, the Sedona Community Center; those are going to be eliminated.”

Adams suggested people look to the city’s newly-formed Budget Steering Committee to see exactly how city funds are spent.

“That is the reason the Budget Steering Committee was formed in the first place, to create another overlay of accountability and transparency in our city government,” Adams said.

For those who believe the city is overpaying employees, Adams said the city pays competitive wages when compared to like-sized cities.

“Are we paying a wage that should not be paid for the size of our city? No. We went out and we did a comparable analysis of other communities of our size and the demands of our resources, and those are the ways that we are determining how we can be competitive. We did that research. We believe the salaries that are being paid are competitive in the marketplace, and we also believe in the value of the employees,” Adams said.

Adams, meanwhile, said individuals who disagree with Sedona City Council members should not take that disagreement out on the home rule option in his opinion, citing some residents who are urging against home rule this year.

“Instead of defeating home rule, what you can do is recall those city members, or you can vote them out of office. That doesn’t have consequences besides replacing city members you don’t agree with. The consequences of voting out home rule impacts everyone in the city in a negative way,” Adams said.

Adams said he’s heard more positive talk than negative in recent years when it comes to the financial health of the community.

“I have heard less chatter out there in the community about the city being in dire consequences financially, being mismanaged, or any of those negative things. I have heard less of that chatter in the last year or even two years than I have heard since I’ve been on City Council in the last six and a half years. I think the majority of the people in the community really understand that the city has done a good job in responding to the downturn in the economy, in addition to creating more accountability and public outreach and transparency [than] in any [other] time in the city’s history,” Adams said.

Sedona City Manager Tim Ernster said city staff attended a number of community-service organization meetings to talk about home rule, including meetings of the Kiwanis and Rotary organizations in Sedona.

“We’ve made presentations on Proposition 420 in trying to inform them what it is and give some history on the state law, and there’s also a [frequently asked questions sheet] that we hand out,” Ernster said. “We also mailed the FAQ sheet out in the sewer bills. We also had the FAQ sheet mailed to every home in Sedona.”

City staff, he said, remains neutral on the matter of home rule and does not make any attempt to encourage residents to vote one way or another.

“We really can’t do that. Elected officials have a little more flexibility than we do,” Ernster said.

When it comes to residents who are speaking out against home rule, Ernster said he isn’t aware of any particular group behind the effort.

“I know there are a few residents out there that have expressed opposition to it, but I’m not aware of any organized effort to oppose it,” Ernster said.