

Summary of Sammamish Seniors' "coffee" with Interim City Manager Scott MacColl

The Sammamish Seniors were delighted to have an in-depth discussion with Mr. MacColl covering a wide range of topics inuring to the benefit of Sammamish seniors and the greater Sammamish community. Scott's past experience included a Masters Degree in City Administration at the University of Washington Evans School, work for the State Legislature and the City of Seattle, and 10 years at the City of Shoreline in government relations. During his time at Shoreline he saw the Sound Transit 2 vision of light rail north through Shoreline evolve from concept to near completion, and the impact of that project on the dynamics of the City growth.

Scott responded to numerous questions from our moderator, Tom Ehlers, and others. Some of his thoughts and insight included:

- His focus is to accomplish stability and consistency at the staff level. Make it clear what is happening and why it's happening while working solely at the direction of the Council. He sees his role now of implementing the change of mind of Council direction and hopes to turn over a city on better footing with the staff and the community.
- Yes, Sammamish is a young city (youngest in Western Washington) and as new cities incorporated in the 1990's under the Growth Management Act, everybody circled around local control. King County development codes weren't urban and we see the legacy: a little haphazard early development pre-incorporation. If Sammamish wants a downtown, where should it occur? Pine Lake Village, the Safeway area, or where? What is the true essence of Sammamish and where is it? Shoreline decided to build the town center around SR 99, but now it is gravitating more towards the light rail corridor.
- Sammamish as a younger city needed a smaller staff. The City has grown, doubling in population since incorporation through annexation and development, and requires more staff. We have to decide what we truly want and how do we pay for it? Next Tuesday we will discuss with Council long term fiscal policy. With inflation running at some 9% and property tax revenue capped by State law at a maximum of 1% per year increase (plus new construction), there are pressures on meeting operating expenses, especially since in Sammamish property taxes is the major source of operating revenue.
- Scott sees his role as a facilitator for the Council. He and staff will always give the options and recommendations, but mostly he is there to facilitate their successful outcome. Also, he helps all councilmembers, across the board.
- Sammamish decided from incorporation to be what we call a contract city. Not knowing how various tasks and functions will settle out as the city matures, it made sense to contract out functions rather than hiring staff for all programs and later having to fire staff while adjusting to work loads. So, Sammamish contracts for police service with King County Sheriff, fire service (through the Eastside Fire and Rescue partnership with Issaquah, North Bend and two fire districts), municipal court, and numerous other functions; perhaps 100 contracts currently.
- The City has to provide what services the community collectively wants; can't just look at one group. There is an operating funds gap coming up and low capital budget. There are needs: we have to replace dated fire stations and assess the level of service for both fire and medical emergency. The struggle is to get the community engaged; almost nobody shows up for budget discussions, but propose an off-leash dog park and you generate interest. Upcoming work includes the Parks, Trails

and Open Space Plan update. The Council weighs public comments heavily and struggles to figure ways to get all parts of the community heard.

- Yes, the Council added senior issues to the workplan and it is important to Councilmembers, but this has to fit into the existing City staff workplan. Parks Department is down a staff person, but Anjali Myers has found a way to help seniors sooner than proposed in the revised workplan. We proponents of senior issues are doing a good job with consistency and continuity of our actions with the City. The City programs only events, not ongoing services; it isn't done for kids and not for adults or seniors. The question is what does the Council and the community want to do collectively. Anjali's staff has proposed use of the city council chambers and Beaver Lake Lodge in the short term for senior activities.

- Tom mentioned that there is a group of seniors working on interim solutions for senior interests and looking towards a partnership with the City towards long term programming, and communications with the City is important. Scott appreciates the dialog with seniors and expressed how important it is to have the Council as part of the dialog. Tom commented that the City has been very helpful in offering locations, with actual usage still uncertain because of the Covid concerns. We do know that there is a need for services for seniors as other cities have learned.

- Scott mentioned that other communities indeed have senior centers with differing structure. Shoreline allocates money for senior programming. He mentioned that we have a great start and we have great partners on the Council, present and past. Basically you can use a knight in shining armor on council, be it Councilmember Howe or another advocate.

- When asked how seniors can be most help to the process of providing senior programming, Scott suggested that continued conversation at the staff level with Anjali and staff; Council needs to hear from both the staff side and the community side.

- When asked how staff is dealing with change and staff morale, Scott deferred suggesting that Rita might be better able to answer that, but he felt bullish in that Council is moving in a good direction. Collectively we are getting to a good place. It is healthy to not have a lock-step Council. He sees local governance as a partnership between staff and Council, and Council and the community. As the City matures we need to hone in on how we want to grow.

- When concerns were expressed about the loss of key staff over recent years, Scott mentioned that the City has filled some 20 positions in recent months. Overall the market is insane. Engineers and maintenance workers are particularly tough to find. Teleworking ongoing for those eligible in Sammamish has helped. He says he has only some 5 open positions trying to fill at this time and is encouraging staff to spread the word. Functionally, costs will be going up. He doesn't have a deputy city manager at this time and with the City being better staffed up does not see that as a compelling need.

Tom thanked Interim City Manager Scott MacColl for joining us in this very informative conversation and we hope to have him back in the future.

- Notes by DonG