

# Where Do We Go From Here?

An opinion by Eric Owens, Chino Valley business owner

## Step 1 – House Cleaning

I would submit that most folks, like myself, who having to work for a living, are able to give very little time and attention to the activities of local government. Therefore we can only try to install competent and qualified individuals who are not given to imposing their own pet agenda, but rather seeking out and laboring for, those things that are the heart, desire, priority, and interests of the many.

Unfortunately the recently exposed Chino water ordinance has clearly revealed that some of our public servants are not serving the many, but the few. And since there is no water crisis that necessitates our immediate action I would suggest six specific areas whereby we might grade the performance of our public servants, and determine if any house cleaning is in order.

1. Public Servants – Are you confident that any or all of your elected officials have been serving in the capacity of a servant? One who inquires into the heart and mind of the majority and labors to that end? When was the last time your elected representatives, in the interest of serving the community, reached out to find the community pulse on a matter prior to committing your money to study, construct, or vote it in? Have any of your public servants asked, “What’s your opinion?” or “How can I serve you better?” Are your public servants serving the many or the few?
2. Transparency – How transparent have the affairs of our servants been? How transparent is the town agenda or town spending? How transparent is the fact-finding or data-gathering behind proposed issues? Folks certainly despise backroom deals and hush-hush projects. I don’t know about you, but things have not been real transparent to me. I’m trying to figure why the latest water ordinance has the heading “Draft – For Council Discussion” when it was previously found under “Final Reformat”. Or why I just recently found out about this ordinance which has reportedly been shaping up for 1 ½ years. But there are other things, like what health, safety, or welfare did I gain over the past five years from a Water Resource Director I unknowingly helped support to the suggested tune of a half million dollars. Or is our town really paying \$60,000 to \$80,000 per year to service a pool that is only open a few months? Or are some really having to move out of their homes because they can’t afford abnormally high sewer bills? How do you rate local government transparency?
3. Stewardship – We want to believe that our elected officials are exercising wise stewardship with the authority, tools, and funds we supply them with. Are they keeping us in the black or the red? Are they spending beyond our means? Are they using local resources wisely? Are they putting projects out to bid? I cannot recall a single time over the past 20 years that the town solicited my company for a well estimate, a pump estimate, an electrical or plumbing job, a service call, or even an opinion, and I’m only one mile away. I would be curious to see how many of our study, engineering, construction, or repair projects actually went out to bid. Or is the “good old boy” network thriving?
4. Triage – In the same manner that any hospital has to perform triage as a method of prioritizing patients, so also ought our local government treat projects with triage. Are they keeping the first things first? Are they prioritizing projects based on community need? Are they spending your money on the things of greatest importance first? Are they studying improvement districts that we can’t afford to improve? Are they spending money to study the effects of rainwater recharge, to the neglect of more important matters? Are they spending money to study road improvement options that we cannot afford to do right now? In an economy where most folks have to cut all the non-essentials, is our town doing the same?
5. Accountability – We all know what it means to be held accountable for our actions, but it seems that more and more politicians are getting immunized against this these days. When was the last time you heard a public servant apologize for having wasted lots of time and hundreds of thousands of tax-payer dollars on a project that was never solicited by the majority? How accountable do you believe your public servants are for their actions?

6. Course Corrections – Are we in the red? Are there “bridge to nowhere” projects or “money pit” projects going on? What course corrections are being made? Is there house cleaning that needs to be done?

### **Step 2 – Stop the Spending**

As one person stated, “Thousands of dollars have been made in gold mining, but sometimes millions are spent making it.” I believe this is the case with our town water system. Seemingly kept below the public radar, Chino’s biggest money wasting vortex is the town water system. Our entire community is being bled for millions of dollars, as it collects thousands from the handful of people it services. Interestingly enough, the folks that are paying for this black hole happen to be the majority that don’t use it, need it, or want it. Also, interestingly enough, the town council (with a straight face) is asking this same majority to pay \$70,000,000 and supersize this hemorrhaging program. What in the world are they thinking? Stop the spending!

### **Step 3 – Public Vote**

I would suggest that the town council gather together all the dollar amounts directly and indirectly invested in Chino’s municipal water system from its inception. Then gather the total revenue collected through paying customers. Then present in a public meeting the profit/loss trend of our town water system. Included in these numbers I would suggest:

- Electrical operating costs
- Pump repair costs
- Pump replacement costs
- Well rehabilitation costs
- Well replacement costs
- Salary costs for a Water resource Director
- Labor costs for operators
- Pipeline and meter costs
- Water line installation and repair costs
- Well leasing
- Well purchases
- Property purchases
- Water right purchases
- H.I.A. purchases
- Well sounding and camera costs
- New source testing costs
- Water tank costs
- Pressure system costs
- Booster system costs
- Engineering costs
- Construction and upgrade costs
- Chlorination costs
- Survey costs
- And don’t forget the \$200,000 waiting to be spent on a new well.

Now let the proponents of this water system demonstrate its ability to operate on its own revenue today, not asking for \$70 million and 20 years to make it profitable. If this cannot be achieved, I would suggest a public vote to determine if the town water company should be auctioned off to the private sector where they can make it profitable, and let the town get out of the water business altogether.

#### **Step 4 – Real Solutions**

- a) Maybe solicit the community to phone, fax, mail, or email their best ideas. I'm sure there are lots of options that won't indenture our children.
- b) Maybe solicit a law firm that would begin to levy a Declining Water Collateral Damage Assessment Fee against Prescott as a result of overdraft.
- c) Maybe look into the validity of the mayor's statistics that claim 3% of the [Prescott?] population uses 30% of our water. If this is true, a few on-site wells would relieve our aquifer of an 800,000,000 gallon deficit per year.
- d) Maybe some simple, inexpensive, non-mandatory rain retention dikes.
- e) Maybe some filtered drainage injection systems.
- f) Please submit your ideas at [www.delriodrilling.com](http://www.delriodrilling.com). Your opinions matter.