

Mayor Bonaguidi ponders Gallup 2022

Written by By Beth Blakeman Managing Editor
Friday, 07 January 2022 05:12



No direction but up

Gallup Mayor Louis Bonaguidi has waded through a trial by fire, starting his first 18 months in office with a pandemic lockdown of the city. COVID-19 is his main concern these days as he considers Gallup's future.

"It's changed everything in our world, period," he told the *Sun*, Dec. 27. "We have so many priorities, but our priorities are on hold."

Bonaguidi mentioned that he was responding to issues on multiple fronts including infrastructure, which he said is in dire trouble. He said the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project is at a standstill. It was to be completed in 2024, but now the Bureau of Reclamation is saying it could be 2029 before it's finished.

The mayor also said the \$15 million to build the new police station has been raised, but it may not be enough. As for the library, he said that's going to be put on hold because of the need for some \$30-40 million.

He believes Coal Street Commons will go out for bid in January. He hopes to see it finished

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before the 100th anniversary of Ceremonial.

Animal Control can't move forward with plans to build, because Gallup hasn't bought the land to build a new facility.

"We're still trying to figure out how we can pay for it," the mayor said.

He also said something needs to be done with Red Rock Park. Up until now he said "we've been band-aiding it."

Where will all this money come from? One answer could be to restore the grocery tax. Bonaguidi said when that went away it was a 30 percent hit to the city.

When it comes to gross receipts taxes, he pointed out that the city is already charging the second highest rate in the state at 8.3125 percent.

"We're a regional shopping area. If we raise our taxes, people will go elsewhere."

He remarked on the 20-25 percent increase in the cost of natural gas and the need to raise the price for wastewater treatment because the city couldn't cover general expenses for employees and equipment.

"That's what it takes to keep the services available," he said.

But there are some brighter spots. Bonaguidi talked about the Escalante Station that closed in Prewitt and the possibility that it could be transitioned to hydrogen. A move like that would save the plant and the paper mill. With support from the governor, he believes it's going to happen.

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Rhino Health, LLC, the glove factory, is looking for two different spots to build. Additionally, Greater Gallup Economic Development Corporation is in discussions for air service for the airport.

Bonaguidi said he's optimistic.

"We're ahead of the curve ... we've all taken it on the chin," noting that Gallup was the first city in the state to mandate masks.

"We've got so many things that are against us. We hit bottom months ago," he concluded. "There's no direction but up for us."

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