



CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Prescott Virtual Community Town Hall

December 16, 2020 – Online via Zoom

The program was opened by the Prescott Commission on Well-Being with welcoming remarks by Peg Travers, Vice Commissioner, and topic introduction by John Murphy, Chairman. The goal of the Commission is to make Prescott America's premier city of well-being. As reflected by the Commission's logo, depicted above left, the key to well-being is balance. Prescott is already considered to be in the top ten communities for well-being. Nonetheless, participants repeatedly voiced concern about heightened political divisiveness and the need to create a safe welcoming place for people of diverse cultures, races, and beliefs. The question now is what can be done to increase well-being for all. One ultimate objective of this quest for well-being is the creation of a sense of community.

Dr. Hojat Askari of Thumb Butte Medical Center explained that to create a sense of community, every year he donates over 1,000 meals to needy people in the community. This is just one of the ways in which Dr. Askari has contributed to the community and his participation in building the community is greatly appreciated. Dr. Askari noted the importance of prevention as part of community well-being and spoke about the impacts of the current pandemic and community-based efforts to address the pandemic.

Courtney Osterfelt, director of the Launch Pad Teen Center, introduced two youth leaders Reilley Phelan and Emma Wymore who spoke about their recent event "Better Together." Concerned about the impacts of racism and privilege and political and cultural differences, they sought to engage youth in conversations about social justice issues, to encourage youth to become more inclusive, and to give them tools to be more effective in communicating across differences.

STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE PRESCOTT COMMUNITY

Prescott is a vibrant community with many fun, cultural events to engage residents and visitors. There are opportunities for volunteer service and social engagement, strong community support for schools, and generous and caring community outreach efforts to help those in need. Prescott has a strong community of volunteers who want to make a difference. There is an incredible generosity of spirit, with people who are willing to step up and get involved in a hands-on way. That helps to build a stronger community, bringing unique talents together to build stronger relationships and foundation. Prescott's greatest treasure is the people who live here.

Another strength of Prescott is that it is a safe, low-crime community. People feel safe and are more welcoming as a result.

Another of Prescott's great strengths is its geography and climate. There are over 100 miles of trails for hiking and numerous parks for recreation, and they are well used.

One of Prescott's strengths is the ability of its residents to inspire one another. There is talent, intelligence, care, and passion residing in the local community. Prescott has its own local versions of Brene Brown and Tony Robbins, and some of the world's best musicians live in this community. The youth who are working to engage the community in discussion about contentious issues, and their courage in addressing issues affecting people of color in a largely white community, are also a source of inspiration.

Prescott has cross-sector partnerships, and these partnerships create successful relationships with people, and lead to a healthy community. The whole-person approach to wellness is the wave of the future but that requires having the hard conversation about why some people are entitled to health care and others are not. Change is hard, but it is achievable if we make the effort to connect with one another across boundaries to address issues that might seem intractable but can change if there is will and effort.

There is a perception, nevertheless, that Prescott government and social networks are somewhat closed, in other words, an insider's network. While there are supportive relationships and other elements of a healthy community within different sub-communities, those sub-communities are sometimes disconnected. For the health of the larger community, Prescott needs to identify common goals between and among its separate groups and establish processes for engaging all members of the community in an open and transparent way.

Events like the protest on the square this summer provide the opportunity for learning and growth. While the white residents of Prescott may not perceive racism as a particular problem in Prescott, the young people participating in the protest were responding to what they perceived as the pain of people of color living in the community, and many of them experienced violent assaults and threats because of their peaceful protest. There is a need to improve communication and understanding, tolerance and acceptance of people with different cultures, languages, beliefs, religions, and goals. Prescott is working hard to create unity within the community, but it can and should do better.

Financial security provides the foundation for the other components of well-being. Unfortunately, some people face challenges in this area, but those who are less well-off are marginalized and often isolated. This is another area that warrants attention. Prescott should invest in programs that address the needs of the less fortunate such as affordable housing, public transit, access to care, and drug abuse prevention, particularly programs that target fentanyl.

Prescott should engage more youth and capitalize on the energy and enthusiasm of its youth. One way to do this would be to bring together caring adult members of the community to engage in discussions and other activities with teens. For example, there are plans to bring back a community garden, which could engage community members across the age spectrum. The median age of Prescott is 58 and 92% are white. Most downtown events are geared to this age group and tourism revenue. More diverse, youth-oriented events in the downtown area rather than on the fringes of town—Dia de los Muertos, pow wows, Scottish highlander festival, Pride Day events, and other youth-oriented events would help create a more inclusive community.

While engaging youth the talents of the older population should not be overlooked. Prescott could take better advantage of the wisdom and experience of its seniors to serve as volunteers, mentors, and engaged residents in service of community efforts. Many older people are able and eager to serve others and this population is a great untapped resource that could be leveraged for good. Pairing this population with teens could create an amazingly effective volunteer force. The schools could be an excellent place for this activity to occur. An added benefit of this pairing would be to create ongoing relationships between younger and older people, increasing the likelihood that young people will find reasons to remain in the community after they graduate from high school.

Excellent schools are another great resource of the Prescott community. They should be a focus of connection for the community and should continue to be supported financially and with volunteer service activities.

We need to have serious conversations about these issues and come up with an action plan to make changes happen.

CURRENT EVENTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

A key factor in resilience is a strong, united, compassionate community. Some groups in Prescott stepped up to promote public health and safety in the wake of COVID-19 in significant ways. For example, Prescott Indivisible and Democratic Women of the Prescott Area (DWPA) spearheaded two mask programs—delivering over 10,000 masks made by community members to the Navajo Nations and Masks for Safe Schools. The quad city area has been engaged in preparing a community health assessment for some time. It is available at <https://www.yavapai.us/Portals/39/Quad-Cities-CHIP.pdf>. COVID-19 has made clear how interconnected health issues are, and how much comorbidities affect health. Many agencies are already doing work on community health issues and should reach out and connect with one another. Those with resources should reach out to these agencies to provide funding and other resources.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has occurred in a poisonous and divisive political environment. This has magnified the impacts to individual and community health. Political divisions, illustrated, for example, by political signs, separate neighbors, foster tribalism, and lead to resentments. These divisions have also undermined the will of political leaders to enforce public health measures, such as the wearing of masks and social distancing requirements. Indeed, some individuals wearing masks in restaurants and stores have reported being bullied and fear retaliation. People report not feeling safe because these basic public health measures are not being observed. One group that sought to promote support for loving your neighbor by publishing a letter to that effect in the local newspaper was told that its members should fear for their lives if the letter was published with attribution.

Those who run care institutions were busy before the crisis hit. They have become busier throughout the crisis, in some cases as a coping mechanism. Despite their hard work and expertise their advice has been ignored or rejected. Many are approaching physical and mental burnout. The Recreation Services Department has also struggled with keeping volunteers engaged while not sacrificing their health since the majority are in a high-risk age category.

In this environment people who are self-isolating to avoid contagion, and caregivers of vulnerable people in special care settings, suffer mental and emotional health impacts. They feel isolated and without community. They feel sad, unsafe, and unsupported. These circumstances have enabled them to understand a little of what people of color must feel living in Prescott.

One take-away is that people should reach out to their neighbors with grace to heal these divisions and repair relationships.

WHAT I WOULD TELL ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS

You must listen, and leadership must reflect everybody. Set your personal beliefs aside, and lead for the benefit of the community. (City Council, Board of Supervisors.)

Be involved. Join in. Be present when local leaders are crafting plans for the community. (City Council, Board of Supervisors.)

Have some courage and lead, even if it's not popular. Do the moral thing, the right thing. (All levels.)

Certain things that are best for the community must be mandated, even though constituents don't like mandates. (All levels.)

Make a place for young people that is equitable. Be inclusive, not ageist. (All levels.)

Lead with values. Define community good, out loud, repeatedly. Lead by example. (City Council, Board of Supervisors.)

Include in the strategic plan a statement against racism and in support of increasing diversity, inclusion, and equity. (City Council.)

Work together. (Local.)

Lead by example. (All levels.)

Collaborate with the private sector to find ways to change people's habits. (All levels.)

Take measures to help people improve physical well-being, such as strengthening their immune systems. (Local.)

Listen to Arizona Town Hall and its reports. Participants at Arizona Town Hall are your constituents. When they are unhappy ballot measures are the result. Work across the aisle for the good of all. (State)

TAKING ACTION

The most important actions to make the Prescott community more vibrant:

- Understand that the world is getting more diverse. Prescott can't stop this and needs to deal with it.
- Showcase the beauty of Prescott by, for example, creating a socially distanced hydration hike.
- Preserve open spaces.
- Keep water in our lakes for the birds. We have several Important Bird Areas (IBA) here in Prescott. We need to continue to care for our lakes.
- Create better transportation options.
- Create more trails for people with disabilities
- Put in parking meters that take credit cards but would allow two hours of free parking. This would eliminate some of the traffic, congestion, and pedestrian/bike/auto accidents that occur.
- Set up lines of communication between different organizations including the city and law enforcement.
- Create more outdoor spaces for the community to use to socialize.
- Have community meetings moderated by professionals.
- Make our community a walkable city like Europe.
- Communication is critical.

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Prescott Virtual Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Promote movement and the importance of hydration.
- Continue to encourage wearing of masks and will always wear my mask when out in public.
- Commit to always working to call out and eradicate racism and bigotry.
- Meet with neighbors again in our back yards when it is safe and focus on all the things, we are together on.

- Host a quarterly neighborhood potluck.
- Do all I can to help mentor young people, academically and professionally, to make them the best leaders they can be. The planet needs them right now!
- Strike up a socially distanced conversation with whomever you see. Say hi.
- Continue our work with the Launch Pad Teen Center and Teen Advisory Committee. We look forward to organizing more events like “Better Together” for youth and adults to advocate for inclusivity and bettering communication skills.
- Keep an eye on our next-door neighbor and help if and when we can.
- Get Tara Jackson to speak about the Arizona Town Hall on our podcast!
- Through the Launch Pad Teen Center, commit to organizing more community education and connection programs.
- Continue to conduct a meditation class weekly.
- Continue to work with the Prescott Commission on Well-Being to improve well-being.
- Listen to the community and try to help.
- COMMUNICATE!