

Gilbert





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Les Presmyk: Impact-fee law restricts ability to expand parks

by **Les Presmyk** - May. 9, 2011 09:38 AM
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My Turn

Once all of the public-safety responsibilities are funded, parks are one of the most important services and amenities the town of Gilbert provides to its residents.

For proof of this, just drive by any of our parks in the evening or on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Soccer, football, baseball, lacrosse or other sports are being played, along with families gathered for reunions and picnics, or skateboarders testing their skills at the skate-park.

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Our parks are definitely an integral part of Gilbert's family-friendly appeal. Parks are part of what make Gilbert Arizona's best community to live in, with national recognition as well.

We have developed a successful model for building and maintaining parks. Master-planned communities build their own community parks. The town builds the larger district and regional parks, like Freestone and Discovery. The Santan Freeway retention basins, rather than ending up as unused, bare dirt patches like at U.S. 60 and the railroad tracks, are now the award-winning Zanjero, Cosmo and Discovery parks.

Arizona and Maricopa County transportation departments not only did the excavation as part of the highway construction, but also contoured these three parks to our final configuration, saving the town's residents significant tax dollars.

A new master parks plan process has been started. The last such effort took place in 2005 when I chaired the council parks subcommittee. As a result, we have encouraged public-private partnerships to bring additional amenities to Gilbert, saving taxes and encouraging businesses to locate in Gilbert.

Polar Ice at Crossroads Park is one example. Three of our parks are partially maintained and have added facilities because of agreements with youth-sports groups. Additional partnerships will be required to develop and maintain parks.

Most of the remaining parks to be constructed are in the south half of Gilbert. Impact fees have been an integral part of building new parks, along with some voter-approved bonds. The new law, Senate Bill 1525, restricts Gilbert's ability to assess impact fees to build these southern parks. Now it will probably require bond elections, and all of Gilbert's residents will be paying for them.

Innovative ideas will be required to build and operate these new parks. One parcel of land is intended as a revenue generator, much like WestWorld in Scottsdale. Public-private partnerships will be required to turn these assets into revenue generators.

Les Presmyk is a Gilbert Town Council candidate.


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