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Joe McKee hoping to unify a divided Desert Hot Springs council



DESERT HOT SPRINGS — The Desert Hot Springs City Council has been a body divided for some time, but financial manager Joe McKee, who won a council seat Tuesday, hopes to build bridges.

According to the unofficial, final election results from the Riverside County Registrar's Office, McKee will replace incumbent Councilwoman Jan Pye, who had campaigned with Mayor Yvonne Parks and Mayor Pro Tem Scott Matas. Matas and Parks will retain their council seats.

Joe McKee. / Provided photo

McKee, a political novice who earned more votes than any other candidate, including the mayor, said Wednesday he hopes the new council "will not be in a position of one-upsmanship and be in continuous battles.

"We need to start being calm and addressing the problems facing the city," he said. "We are all here because we care."

Within Coachella Valley political circles there is a belief that McKee will align himself with council members Russell Betts and Adam Sanchez, because he was politically backed by some of the same people who have previously supported Betts and Sanchez.

However, McKee said he will stand for what he believes in and will not be swayed by other council members.

“We don’t agree on everything. As a matter of fact, we don’t agree on a lot of things.

“Anyone that knows me knows I’m not the kind of person that just goes along with these discussions,” he said.

Moving forward, he said his goal will be to create a consensus between all members and not just to “ram things through.” He stressed the need for a consensus-based decision-making process.

“Building consensus is just something missing from politics in general,” McKee said. “There is a perception that you can’t do your job without giving in a little, or getting most of what you want.”

On election night, before all the votes were tallied, Parks said that if McKee wins her hope is that “he will think for himself and not be pressured by other council members.”

As for challenges facing the city, McKee said his biggest concern “is the budget right now — it’s a big question mark. Both sides are making assumptions on a projected budget that could be correct or not.”

There needs to be more oversight and proper management of city staff, he added. Other issues that McKee said he will focus on are the city’s “retail problems.”

“We have no retailers, no movie theaters, no entertainment, and no bowling alleys” a lot of people go outside of Desert Hot Springs to spend their money, he said, adding that quality-of-life and median incomes need to be increased for retailers to find Desert Hot Springs inviting.