

Tornquist Analysis of Water Tower Process

When everything was said and done, the council did a disservice to the process of selecting the color scheme for the new water tower. We settled on expediency rather than giving what will be a highly visible structure, a structure that will provide many people with their first impression of our community, the due diligence it deserved.

The local paper did a disservice to the process as well, never understanding the opportunity before us, and choosing instead to make the discussion appear trivial. The amount of time spent on the topic was grossly exaggerated, and the paper seemed more interested in focusing on personalities than on the merits of the discussion.

The process did not need to be divisive or controversial. It could have been a fun, interesting opportunity for the community to come together and select the decoration for the tower. A committee should have been formed to take input from the citizens. We could have sponsored a contest to generate interest and ideas.

The new water tower provided the opportunity to market ourselves in a manner that few communities take advantage of, and at a low cost compared to other short term marketing strategies. We all know who and what we are; the goal is to use all the tools at our disposal to draw new people into our community. Will a new tower with a fancy paint job draw people to Mason City all by itself? Clearly not, but a community that pays attention to detail on the simple things is representative of a community that is progressive, and has its act together. That is the underlying message we want visitors to receive.

As we often do, the council made a fairly simple process complex. Rather than breaking the task down into pieces, we chose instead to eat the apple in one big bite. Simply put, we should have first selected the color of the tower, then decided if "Mason City" would be on it (followed then by font size, orientation, and color), then discussed the viability of additional artwork representative of our culture. As it was, we dealt with all of these issues in a composite motion, making it difficult to craft a motion that could receive consensus support. Ultimately, the Mayor broke a 3-3 split. While this dispensed of the issue, it may have been wiser to permit the process to continue to work these issues out.

On the positive side, the completed water tower does represent compromise by all members of the council. While no one person got exactly what he wanted, neither was any person left out of the process. In the end, every person got a little something. While the tower will not include any artwork that represents our heritage, we have broken the norm and will paint the tower in "earth tones" that it might stand unique in comparison to other towers in the community, while complimenting its surroundings. "Mason City" will adorn the tower, while once again the color of the text will be unique.

The tower will be attractive, and it will be different enough to draw attention. We've created a product that will be better than the predecessors; time will tell if it is as good as it could have been.

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