



City Democracy in Action

by Darin Atteberry
Column

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These are remarkable times for government. The presidential election is captivating the country. The national economy is weak and challenging for many. And the 2008 Colorado ballot is one of the longest in state history.

For me, election season is a good reminder of the importance of transparency across all levels of government. The beauty of our democratic process is that it requires accountability by government to the people. Now, more than ever, is the time to be involved in your government's decisions.

In many respects, it's easiest to influence decisions at the local government level. You can contact your council representative or city staff members. You can speak at Council and board meetings. You can provide input on everything from building codes to multi-million-dollar budgets. You can go further and make formal recommendations by serving on a board or commission. Ultimately, you could run for city council. At every step in the process there are ways for you to be informed, involved, and actively engaged in your government's actions. Just as importantly, you hold us accountable.

Maintaining public accountability and transparency in our city operations is a personal value for me, and it is a value to which City Council is committed, as well. That commitment is evidenced by the many ways we make our actions visible to the community.

All council meetings are aired live and replayed on cable Channel 14, and are available as video on demand online at fcgov.com/video. Monthly financial reports, sales and use tax reports, and our detailed city budget are published for your review online at fcgov.com/finance. Next year we will design our online purchasing information to make it even easier for you to know exactly where and how we're spending your tax money. For many projects, we actively seek community feedback, and your input is an important factor throughout the decision-making process. We work hard to foster relationships with the business community, neighborhood groups, Colorado State University and Front Range Community College, and others so that we can all work in the best interest of Fort Collins residents.

Our government structure also adds accountability in a way that is fairly unique. Did you know that Colorado is the only state that requires voter approval for all tax increases? In most states, the local or state governing bodies can increase taxes when they feel it is warranted with a majority vote. That's not the case in Colorado. The result is that government is required to be

accountable for our spending and to prioritize our projects; that we are efficient and creative in providing the services you desire. In order to propose and pass a tax measure, we must demonstrate a legitimate funding need to you. From my perspective, that's a good thing; citizens have a direct voice in determining how to fund the services that are important to them.

Maintaining an open and accountable local government only works when citizens become engaged in the decision-making process. I'm proud that people here really care about Fort Collins. When we are engaged in our community, we end up with better solutions.

The same is true for our state and our nation. Take time to learn about the many issues on our state ballot this year, and the issues in the national election. And then take advantage of your right to vote. After all, it's our future at stake!