

Dear Editor,

I met Mike Virdell a little over a year ago after a city council meeting where, as co-chairman of the Llano Citizens Water Committee, I had spoken to the council seeking their blessings and help as we organized a city wide river cleanup day. He came up to me after the meeting and introduced himself as a candidate for mayor. We spent about 45 minutes standing on the sidewalk in front of city hall talking about ways to improve the city. He seemed to like my ideas at that time, so much so that he came by my office for an additional hour and a half visit with my family later that week and subsequently invited us to his house to work on his campaign strategy. After he was elected I continued to stop by his office and offer input into the city's future plans.

One of the things I proposed to the new mayor was the installation of a solar power farm. Llano is currently heavily dependent on revenue from the sale of water and electricity. It accounts for a large portion of the city's revenue stream. Under our current contract with LCRA we can produce up to 35 percent of our own power. So instead of being a middleman in the chain, Llano could become a producer. That could mean lots more money in the city's coffers with no increase in electric rates or taxes. In fact, over time it could actually lower Llano consumers electric bills.

Because I own a company that sells and installs residential and light commercial solar power systems I probably have a better understanding of solar power than most people. So the mayor asked me to put a proposal together. I spent two months gathering data and setting up a plan with an international solar power company. The proposal would have been a public/private consortium that would have had the solar power company installing the equipment at their expense and taking the federal tax credit, operating the system and collecting revenue off of sales of power, all the while depreciating the equipment, and then after the plant was fully depreciated, giving the facility to the city for a tax write-off.

The city would then outright own a power plant that cost the citizens of Llano zero dollars and with an additional 20 to 30 years of life expectancy. The net result would be new revenue for the city amounting to millions of dollars per year over the remainder of the life of the plant. It seemed like a good idea to me. Just so you'll know, neither my company nor myself would have gotten a dime from this venture, nor did I charge the city for anything for the weeks of work I spent in putting the proposal together. The mayor gave me about 90 seconds to explain all this to council in the non-agenda items part of the council meeting on October 21, 2013. The video is still available on the city's web page if you want to watch it.

That was the last I ever heard of the city's consideration of this proposal. Now the mayor wants to make an issue out of this for the upcoming council election. He acts like having a 12 million dollar power plant given to the city is a bad thing. There were far fewer strings attached to the solar farm proposal than to the federal grants he is pursuing in connection to the smart meters the current council forced on all of us. (By the way I hope you like the new look of the lovely black and neon blue boxes that have appeared in our yards all over town.)

The simple fact is that Mayor Virdell doesn't like any idea that isn't his own. He calls people who have genuine concerns over how the city's business is handled as having "hate and malice in their approach." Really? Just because someone questions what you are doing makes them a hater? What happened to your campaign promise from last year that you failed to mention in the opening paragraph of your remarks, the one about "listening to citizen's concerns and allowing them to have a voice." That promise seems to have been forgotten.

Anytime there is give and take in a public forum there is always a better outcome. If the mayor wants a council that will simply rubber stamp all his agenda items without question, then by all means heed his advice and keep the same council. However, if you are like me and you are tired of government that doesn't listen, spends money like they have an unlimited supply and has an agenda that doesn't seem to line up with what the people think is really important, then I hope you do give all the

candidates a look and make your decision accordingly.

Marion Bishop