

# *Mary Souza's Newsletter*

*July 31, 2013*

## **Does NIC need an Arena?**

Dear Newsletter Readers,

Well, the campaigns are heating up early this time, with many new people jumping into the races. There are all kinds of rumors circulating and personal attacks seeping out, carefully spread without proof, just innuendo. It's about what I expected but it will get much worse as we move into the Fall.

The only way for me to counter some of the absurd character attacks is to keep speaking out on issues of importance to our community, like I have been doing for the past six years. So let's talk a bit about the proposed NIC Arena.

The Arena may not seem like a City of CdA topic because it will be owned by NIC, but two potential building sites will eventually be within the City boundaries because they are planning to apply for annexation and ask for inclusion in a LCDC urban renewal district.

I attended the Arena workshop last week, which included the Arena planning committee and the NIC Trustees. The public was allowed to listen but not to speak.

Full disclosure: My husband, Rick, is on the Arena planning committee. He was added several weeks into the process to replace someone who could not attend. Rick is an events professional, with a great deal of information and experience as owner of our events business for the past 29 years.

So, at last week's workshop with the Trustees, I was expecting the planning committee to be forthcoming with the real pros and cons of the project, and explain to the Trustees all the many considerations of this decision. That's not what happened, at least not at first. The Power Point presentation by those pushing the proposal was all good; no problems, it will be great. But then Trustee Ron Nilson (pictured above) started asking some pointed questions about the 2008 financial feasibility study, which is the basis of the projected numbers for today's project. The answers were not reassuring.

And Rick brought up concerns about the concessions revenues that would have to go to maintenance and operations rather than to the NIC Booster Club, which has always used them as part of its scholarship program. And that the Spokane Arena manager, whom Rick brought to speak to the committee weeks before, reported that that without beer sales and parking fees, their arena would not break even. NIC, as a state school, cannot sell alcohol, though there may possibly be a way to get limited approval. And the parking at one of the possible building sites would be almost impossible to control because it's part of Riverstone, with

free parking areas nearby.

There are also many concerns about the planned pre-fab metal building itself, which would start out as a very basic gym for \$15 million. Any other “multi-uses”, such as concerts or other events, would add more dollars to the price tag for staging, lighting, different floors, reinforced ceiling hanging structures, etc. Almost every Trustee questioned whether NIC (read: the taxpayers of Kootenai County) should be responsible for the maintenance and operations of this facility, as well as any debt incurred on an annual basis. Does it fit with the school's educational purpose?

It is a decision the NIC Board of Trustees will need to make, one which will impact everyone in our community. Trustee Ron Nilson challenged the planning committee to find at least two cities of similar size to CdA that have built this style of events Arena, and to report back on their experience and outcomes. Great idea.

An Arena could be a good addition to our area. Rick continues to gather information, trying to find a responsible way forward. We will be all for it if the research is made current, complete, accurate and shows strong financial feasibility...and the people of Kootenai County are given a VOTE.

That's what it's all about, dear Readers--the process! Any major public project must have decision making that is open, inclusive, transparent, thorough, fiscally responsible, and respectful of the public's vote.

I'm not “against everything”, as some of my critics try to claim, I'm FOR an honest, responsible process. **That's my promise to you when I am Mayor.**

Please join me in this effort because it will take all of us to push forward through “the way things have always been done”. And let's remember the words of Margaret Mead, the celebrated anthropologist who studied civilizations and cultures all over the world:

**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."**

Have a great rest of the week! --Mary

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*Mary Souza lives in Coeur d'Alene and is running for Mayor. The election is Nov. 5, 2013. She is a former critical care nurse and nursing instructor and has owned a local business for the past 29 years. She was a CdA Planning and Zoning Commissioner for 6 years and Chair of the city's first Open Space Committee. Mary wrote a political column for the CdA Press for two years and, more recently, has sent a free, weekly email newsletter to offer information and opinion on local issues. To donate to her campaign, volunteer to help or sign up for her free email newsletter, please visit [www.maryformayorcda.com](http://www.maryformayorcda.com)*

To donate: P.O. Box 506, CdA, ID 83816

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