

A New Reign Begins

...jockeying for position already happening...

by Kat Rowoldt

Oh, a new day has dawned in San Angelo. San Angelo now has its very first female Mayor. Like President Trump, Mayor Gunter has not previously held an elected position before. You'll now hear, Madam Mayor, spoken in the council chambers.



Mayor Morrison was one of the first to arrive that morning. His greeting to me as I was setting up my camera was, “well Kat, now that I’m gone, who are you and Joe Hyde going to bash now?” That was an unusual greeting, one which caused me to pause a bit before replying. I dare say, a bit of his true emotions were in his question. My response, “Joe Hyde and I do not work together, and you received as many kudos as hits from me. Did you not read your kudos?” Apparently not.

The official changing of the guard seemed to take forever to get to on the agenda. They were doing a split session, with the seated council members hearing the old business items before canvassing of the votes, next seating the new members, and then addressing the new council items.

It was a full house to witness this transition. Friends and family of both the new and outgoing council members were in attendance. Additionally, Chris Giroux and Anna Bartosh, candidates in unsuccessful races were there as well. Giroux had posted on Facebook he planned to continue attending the regular meetings to hold his Council member, Lucy Gonzales, accountable.

Marty Self and former Mayor Dwain Morrison gave their farewell speeches. In both, they each stressed what a wonderful city staff San Angelo has, and they did not deserve the bashing they had taken during this election season. As quickly as he could, Morrison grabbed his rattlesnake hat and exited the front of the room, then left the building. Charlotte Farmer will continue to serve until her seat is filled through a run-off election between Steve Hampton and Billie DeWitt.

While the first half of the meeting was a comedy of errors; from Morrison getting lost in protocol on the agenda, to Lucy Gonzales jumping into the midst

of official photos being shot of another new council member so she could get to the microphone to be sworn in. Yes, I'd say there was a bit of nerves, and emotions, in the room that morning.

Finally, the new members were seated and there were now seven active members on the council once again. This will be the face of the City Council for the next two months, until July 18th when Charlotte Farmer will step down after twelve years of service in that capacity.

Mayor Brenda Gunter - conservative, Republican
SMD 1 - **Tommy** Hiebert - liberal, more Democrat
SMD 2 - **Tom Thompson** - handpicked by Marty Self
SMD 3 - Harry **Thomas** - liberal, Democrat
SMD 4 - Lucy Gonzales - liberal, Democrat
SMD 5 - Lane Carter - conservative, Republican
SMD 6 - Charlotte Farmer - to be replaced by either a Republican or Democrat
[How confusing is having 3 Toms - all seated beside one another - to boot!]

It's obvious this new council is once again more liberal than conservative. But will the community like that? The conservative Republican choice, Steve Hampton, SMD 6 candidate, is sorely needed on the council to bring a closer balance to the two mindsets.

It was far from a boring council meeting. We had feathers flying, and feelings hurt, all laid out in open public display. In old business, one of the agenda items was the reimbursement of expenses to Lane Carter for having attended the Ports-to-Plains conference in Washington DC on behalf of Charlotte. It seems last November a decision had been made by council that Harry Thomas would cover for Charlotte at the P-t-P meetings if she was unable to attend. Interestingly, not a soul could remember this having happened, myself included, except for Thomas.

When Harry became aware Lane was asked by Charlotte to attend, which asking a fellow council person to attend had always been normal protocol if the appointee was not able to go, he sent an email to City Manager, Daniel Valenzuela, and fellow council members about the matter. Thomas was able to substantiate his claim that he was the one who should have gone to represent San Angelo from Council minutes. After some bantering, a bit heated at that, a vote was taken to reimburse Carter for his out of pocket expenses. Mayor Morrison had seconded the vote to "get the man reimbursed."

When the new council was seated, the first item was to appoint the new mayor pro tem. The same tension was felt between Carter and Thomas. Both men would like to be chosen as the mayor pro tem. Harry Thomas made a motion

immediately to postpone the decision until the new council is fully seated in July. Lane Carter seconded the motion.

A few more views of personalities were seen with the new council members. In looking at the future meeting dates, a decision was needed about the meeting which will fall on July 4th, along with pre-thinking dates for budget workshops. While the July 4th meeting was canceled and not rescheduled, the budget workshops added in August, it appears the council will be meeting weekly, either on Council or budget workshop during the month of August.

While Gunter and Hiebert were totally open to doing weekly meetings if needed to really go over the budget, Thomas commented he didn't think he could handle seeing them (fellow council members) weekly. Gunter expressed a real concern in having the time needed for the new council members to get up to speed on the budget.

Future items and information the council members requested were:

Farmer - she would like to be updated on the City Auditorium construction, plus the new light status on Sherwood Way and the ability to egress and ingress safely when the new HEB opens.

Gunter - would like to see the docs on the Ford Ranch to review.

As I was packing up the camera and my things to leave, Anthony Wilson, City of San Angelo Public Information Officer, was moving in the light stands and setting up to take the new official photographs of the Mayor and Council Members. The new reign has begun.

Until next time....

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