

Flagstaff Mayoral candidates discuss biggest challenges facing the city

By Michael Manny November 1, 2020 (updated November 4, 2020)

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. – After months of campaigning, Election Day 2020 is here – but the presidency and Congressional seats are not the only notable races on the ballot. Flagstaff voters will also be choosing their next mayor.

With current Mayor Coral Evans seeking a seat in the Arizona State House of Representatives, two candidates are running to succeed her: Charlie Odegaard and Paul Deasy.

[Odegaard](#) is a third-generation owner of Odegaard’s Sewing Center, on Fourth Street, and was elected to the Flagstaff City Council in 2016. Previously, he served on the Flagstaff Water Commission for three years.

[Deasy](#) is a research analyst at NAU, and previously [ran](#) for City Council in 2018, narrowly losing to Regina Salas. He previously served as president of Bridging Flagstaff and a former board member of Coconino County Advocates for Human Services.

Although Deasy is a registered Democrat, and Odegaard a Republican, the mayor’s office is non-partisan.

In interviews, both candidates discussed their campaigns and the biggest challenges facing Flagstaff.

Housing

Affordable housing has long been an issue in Flagstaff, and both candidates discussed this need. While campaigning in 2016, Odegaard met residents in Siler Homes, a city-owned development that provides affordable housing. Once elected to council, he said he found there was a waiting list three years long.

If elected, Odegaard wants to see through the development of a two-acre property next to Siler he noticed during his 2016 campaign.

“My very first meeting I had with the city manager at the time, I said there's a vacant land next to Siler. Does the city own it? And he said, ‘well, let me look into it’ and we did not own it, the city, and then I said, we should buy it,” Odegaard said.

Regarding student housing developments, Odegaard said he gets questions from voters on why council approved student housing developments. Due to property rights, council does not get to approve some developments.

“The student housing projects that we see today that are built around town, especially along the Milton corridor, Route 66 corridor, were all built by property rights of their zoning that they had in place that was placed in by City Council back in 1972,” Odegaard said.

Deasy said he would like to see the policies in the city’s [incentive policy for affordable housing](#) redrawn into a single development plan that includes incentives like a faster process for code approvals.

“The thing is we don’t have a single document of incentive policies for developers in general, and a lot of time they can pick and choose,” Deasy said.

With a faster process to approval, Deasy said both parties could benefit.

“That means developers make money more quickly, and that means we get more affordable housing more quickly, and that seems like one way that’s a win-win,” Deasy said.

Climate change

Earlier this year, City Council declared a climate emergency, and pledged to make flagstaff carbon neutral by 2030. To reach that ambitious goal, Deasy said it will come down to the “dollars and cents.”

Two facets Deasy discussed were bringing fully electric buses through state and federal grants and building new construction to be energy efficient. One project specifically mentioned was the new Municipal Courthouse downtown.

“That (the courthouse construction) seemed like a wasted opportunity to not have solar panels and not have an energy efficient carbon neutral building that for something that the city was funding,” Deasy said.

Odegaard said that the city is going to have to have relationships with utility companies like APS to reach the goal, as it will be difficult for the community to do it on its own.

“We’re going to have to have partner with them and sort of, you know, creating solar farms, windmill farms,” Odegaard said.

Economic recovery

Odegaard explained that Flagstaff is a tourism based economy, and a lot of people were hit hard by the pandemic.

“We don’t have a lot of that steady business models that can kind of weather the storms,”

Odegaard said. “And, where like W.L. Gore, a very national world leader in manufacturing, especially on the medical side of things, and I want to see more of that here in our community.”

On his [website](#), Odegaard said the city is working with a developer to build a business park on 30 acres near Flagstaff Pulliam Airport.

Possible solutions Deasy lists on his [campaign site](#) include reducing the time inspections to start a business take, as well as licensing and permit fees.

Results

After polling places closed at 7 p.m., the first [results](#) were released by the Coconino County

Elections Office at 8 p.m. At the last updated results, Nov. 4 at 1:44 a.m., Deasy led with 55.97

% of the vote, compared to Odegaard's 44.03 %. In a Facebook post Nov. 4, Odegaard thanked voters for their support.

