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WEEKEND EDITION

Stars, council align for Dark Sky

By Michael Rinker
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Sedona is on the cusp of becoming just the seventh city in the world to be named a Dark Sky community, a designation that City Manager Tim Ernster characterized as “another arrow in our quiver of destination marketing.”

City Council voted 5-2 at its Tuesday, June 24, meeting to approve a Dark Sky Community

policy and a lightscape management plan that cleared the way for the designation by the International Dark-Sky Association.

The IDA advocates against human-produced light pollution.

“Poor lighting threatens astronomy, disrupts ecosystems, affects human circadian rhythms and wastes energy to the tune of \$2.2 billion per year in the U.S. alone,” according to its website.

About two years ago, the city abandoned a similar effort after it

appeared an IDA official wouldn't vote in favor, according to discussion at Tuesday's meeting.

Now, the IDA has already granted provisional approval and, in light of City Council's approval of the policy and plan, is expected to give final approval at its board meeting in July.

According to a city document, highlights of the policy and plan include:

- Consultation with Keep Sedona Beautiful — which spearheaded the Dark Sky application

process — on future outdoor lighting projects on city properties as well as the installation of any adaptive controls;

- Compliance with the existing outdoor lighting code;

- Prohibition of new roadway lighting on city public rights-of-way unless required for safety or security reasons;

- Collaboration with KSB to promote Dark Sky-compliant lighting and to educate

» see STARS | 8A

STARS: Council votes to pursue a Dark Sky designation

From Page 1A

the community.

There is no cost to the city at this time, but as IDA-compliant lighting systems replace older ones or are newly installed — for instance, at the planned outdoor events venue at Posse Grounds Park — they could be more expensive than non-compliant ones.

As a Dark Sky community, Sedona can display the IDA logo in publications, promotions, website and signs throughout the city. It also allows other groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to use the logo when identifying the Sedona area in its publications, promotions, brochures and website.

Opponents of the designation argued that it was too little — Councilman John Martinez

said Sedona hadn't “earned” it — and too late — Councilwoman Barbara Litrell said it was akin to “locking the barn door after the horse has already been stolen.”

Litrell was referring to the street lights installed along State Route 89A, a key factor she said thwarted the first effort.

“Nothing has really changed, except the staff of the IDA,” she said. “We already got our 108 street lights.”

Litrell also questioned whether the community truly cares about the designation.

Joanne Kendrick, of Keep Sedona Beautiful, which spearheaded the effort, assured the councilwoman that “We do have the community behind us.”

Litrell countered by saying, “From a verbal standpoint, yes [But] what has the

community done to retrofit their properties? Will they put their money where their mouth are?”

She also took a shot at Keep Sedona Beautiful's past commitment, saying, “When the going got tough, KSB was not there.”

Martinez said he wasn't supporting the initiative because he felt as though the IDA lowered its standards.

“We didn't really earn it,” he said. “It's almost like we're cheating to get it.”

His opinion notwithstanding, Councilwoman Jessica Williamson said, “No matter what happened before, this is good for Sedona and could only bring better things.”

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