

Why I'm not hot on Hatami

Posted on December 4, 2011 by Mike

In light of Tim's [post](#) yesterday and his column this morning, I've given some more thought to Jon Hatami's nascent candidacy for City Council.

I think the reason why some of us find his candidacy so interesting is that he really represents a different type of candidate. He's not running so much that he's upset with the politics of the City Council, but rather because he's upset with the way things are – the net result of things. Call it “[The Rent is Too Damn High](#)” approach.

It fits in with our romantic view of the regular guy who wants to take on City Hall. That makes him a lot more like the average resident than most candidates, who are typically insiders, gadflies at city hall or who run out of self-delusion.

The challenge for nontraditional candidates is that the average resident is less likely to vote than wonks like us. Many of our neighbors aren't all that mad or scared, either. They look around and like the way things are, and they just want more of the sweet stuff: parks, trails, pools, sports, concerts, etc.. These are your Laurie Ender voters, in a nutshell.

With a wild-eyed anti-crime platform, Hatami is after a different type of resident. It's an interesting angle and there are plenty of people who will eat it up, so I think he'll find a niche. But even if I agreed with his policy goals, I think there's a problem at the core of this kind of candidacy that transcends ideology.

There is, as Tim mentioned, a problem with those of us “in the weeds” where our view of what's possible isn't broad enough. But if we make some slight adjustments to our thinking, it isn't too difficult to separate our cynicism from our informed sense of what can and can't be done within the boundaries that our city council operates.

A lot of Hatami's proposals simply aren't achievable because there are genuinely immovable pieces that stand in the way. It might be the budget, jurisdiction, state law, federal law, the constitution or just political reality.

He's offering solutions that over-promise on outcomes, solutions to problems that don't exist and solutions to things already solved.

What's wrong with a little dreaming? Don't we want someone who thinks big? Sure, but there's a line between thinking big and having your head in the clouds. There's a line

between populism and pandering. There's a real problem when your campaign is built on promises that you can't deliver. If you are playing to the average, uninformed resident, you really shouldn't come selling a bill of goods or re-selling us things we've already bought.

It's been said by many and I think it's true here as much as anywhere: politics is the art of the possible. Work within the limits of your power, compromise as needed, do the best with what you have.

It should go without saying, because usually it does. Our council and the notable challengers over the years, despite their policy disagreements, get it.

Say what you will about David Gauny (and I've said plenty), but he understands the rules of the game. Jon Hatami has brought a hockey stick to a game of chess.

The game isn't unknowable and Hatami might learn it in time, if he cares to. When he learns the rules it might not even want to play. Until then, I'm taking a pass on Team Hatami.