

High expectations

Becker's problem-solver style spurs hope for less adversarial administration

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More than anything, Salt Lake City residents should expect consensus to triumph over truculence.

And uncork the long-awaited tonic for capital workers, Davis County leaders and state lawmakers, weary after eight years of Rocky Anderson's rancor.

According to colleagues, past and now present, Mayor-elect Ralph Becker's City Hall will be civil, stable and structured. It also should be green, open and fair.

"There won't be the adversarial nature that existed under Rocky," says Councilman Eric Jergensen, who notes Becker already has planned one-on-one fence-mending meetings with council members. "Frankly, that will be a very refreshing change."

For 11 years on Utah's Capitol Hill, much of it as the Democratic House leader, Becker cemented a reputation for building coalitions and treating political rivals with respect.

Patrice Arent, who served as minority whip under Becker, insists that style will carry over to the Mayor's Office.

"He's really so good at including people and listening to them," she says. "Ralph's a consensus builder, and he's a joy to work with."

Hallmarks under Becker, Arent says, will be transparency and preparation - an administrator used to deadlines who always does his homework.

The environmental planner also will maintain the capital's climate-change momentum, she says, given his careerlong focus on outdoor issues "before they were the 'in' issues."

Arent also expects the new mayor to mollify city employees, many who languished, left or were fired under Anderson's turnover-heavy tenure. And, if there is a surprise, she says it may be the new boss' modesty.

Arent notes Becker blushed and was "shocked" Sunday when he got a spontaneous standing ovation after being introduced at former President Clinton's fundraiser for former first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's presidential campaign at the University of Utah.

So Becker may need to bulk up on sunscreen for the new spotlight.

Besides a shift in tone, Becker also pledges nuts-and-bolts change. He wants to chart a network of dedicated bicycle lanes; remedy the "shameful" neglect of the Jordan River; and overhaul the city's dysfunctional planning division.

The 55-year-old Avenues resident also plans to construct partnerships with the city's public schools, led by a high-level executive.

In addition, Becker will be able to heal the sores still festering between the left-leaning capital and the GOP-dominated Legislature, according to Rep. Steve Urquhart, R-St. George.

"You can expect Ralph to start building bridges and bringing people together," says Urquhart, who calls Becker a problem-solver. "It's important that the Legislature and the capital city can at least dialogue. We'll sure be able to do that better."

Soren Simonsen, a fellow urban planner who represents Sugar House on the City Council, says, given the city's growing pains, Becker's background makes for a perfect fit. He will preserve neighborhoods, Simonsen says, blur religious lines, advocate for more public transit and save open space.

"People will be surprised and delighted at how all of the years of his advocacy in his legislative work will translate into effective leadership and programs for the city."

Still, Kirk Jowers, director of the U.'s Hinckley Institute of Politics, says the rap on Becker is that he has not been very effective on Capitol Hill.

"It is imperative that he shows some accomplishments early to dispel that," Jowers says. "His worst-case scenario: He becomes the Jimmy Carter presidency - a bright, affable man who is not able to move the ball."

Becker points to his promise-filled, 180-day action plan as evidence that he will "hit the ground running" come Jan. 7 and meet "every one of those initiatives." Besides, the mayor-elect says, voters obviously didn't buy the "ineffectiveness" tag slapped on him by opponent Dave Buhler.

Jowers says Becker does not see the position as a stepping stone and likely will surprise people.

"This is his dream job," he says. "People in the city are yearning for someone who can have a nuts-and-bolts impact. The opportunity is there, and I think he will seize it."

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* Tribune reporter HEATHER MAY contributed to this story.

He titles it: Education, Environment, Equality, Engagement, Excitement. It is Mayor-elect Ralph Becker's 180-day action plan, which can be viewed at www.ralphbecker.com.

For instance, Becker vows to:

- * **Hire a senior-level education coordinator, launch monthly school summits and create a scholarship fund.**
- * **Plan bikeways, implement green-building standards and unfurl a comprehensive planning-policy review.**
- * **Issue an executive order on his first day requiring companies that contract with the city to provide domestic-partner benefits.**
- * **Urge the City Council to widen the nondiscrimination ordinance and establish a registry for domestic partnerships.**
- * **Add 20 police officers and strengthen neighborhood watch.**

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