

My Perspective on Homelessness in Mesa

A few years ago, a different City Council voted to use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars to buy the old motel we now call Sunaire. If I'd been at that table, I would've voted no.

Not to score points. Not to relitigate the past. But because these decisions matter. That wasn't Monopoly money. It was the people's money. And when you're entrusted with it, you don't get to use it to virtue signal.

Let's start here: homelessness in Mesa – and across this country – is real. It's painful. You see someone sleeping out of doors in the heat, in the cold, and if you've got a conscience, it bothers you. It should. Caring about your neighbor isn't political. It's moral. We should help. We must help.

But the question isn't whether we care. The question is how we help – and whether we're doing it in a way that's fair to everyone.

Compassion untethered from common sense can turn into recklessness. Good intentions don't guarantee good outcomes. We have to ask hard questions: Does buying and operating a motel address the root causes of homelessness – addiction, untreated mental illness, job loss, broken families? Or does it just move the problem around and make us feel like we did something?

There are nonprofits, faith-based groups, and community organizations already in this fight. The good ones don't just hand out keys and hope for the best. They combine shelter with structure, accountability, and a path toward stability. Many of them do it with measurable results – and without writing a blank check from the taxpayer.

And that matters, because when you hold public office, you're not spending your own paycheck. You're spending a single mom's grocery money. A retiree's fixed income. A small business owner's narrow margin. The public checkbook isn't a prop for moral theater. It's a trust. And it ought to be handled like you'd handle your own family budget – carefully, responsibly, with respect for limits.

The Sunaire project is now north of \$12 million. At some point, we have to ask: are we solving a problem, or are we throwing more money at a decision we're afraid to reconsider?



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I don't doubt the motives of the people who supported it. I believe they acted sincerely. In a self-governing community, good people can disagree about methods. That's not a weakness of democracy. It's proof that it's alive.

But we also have to face reality. If we try to unwind or repurpose Sunaire, we may be required to repay a significant share of those federal dollars. That's not a footnote – it's a real constraint. It narrows our options whether we like it or not.

Still, constraints don't absolve us of responsibility. They force discipline. They demand creativity. They require us to focus on what actually works.

There is a path forward – one that treats homelessness with seriousness, honors our legal and financial obligations, and respects the taxpayer who made all of this possible in the first place.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rich Adams", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Rich Adams
Councilmember, District 1