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COMMON SENSE COALITION STARTS WITH IDEAS

EDITORIAL

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A group representing Madison's new Common Sense Coalition dropped in the other day and, well, made a lot of common sense.

Some are trying to find some sinister motives behind the group that includes such diverse activists as moderate Republican Ray Allen and the head of the local Building and Construction Trades Council, Scott Vaughn.

But, from what members of the group told us in an editorial meeting, the only thing sinister appears to be their desire to get city and county politicians to stop feuding and start pulling together for the future of the Madison area.

Joining Allen and Vaughn to explain the role the coalition hopes to play in the months and years ahead were Peter Munoz, who heads Centro Hispano, the organization that advocates for the thousands of Hispanics in our community; Scott Favour, the Madison cop who heads the police union; and David Hart, a local attorney who is interested in seeing more diversity in local governments.

The coalition has named an interim board of directors, which includes the five listed here, and claims to have 4,000 members from labor unions, small businesses and nonprofits, all of whom are interested in a variety of issues facing Madison and Dane County. And they'd like to have a role in solving them in a variety of ways.

Yes, they want to push economic development, but not at the expense of responsible land use. They think government could be more "customer friendly" and they're worried about public safety issues, like whether we have enough police officers in Madison as the city continues to grow by leaps and bounds.

Munoz, who worked for Sue Bauman when she was mayor, thinks, for example, that local government has taken its eye off things like the response time for police and firefighters, that we're too involved with building and expanding while neglecting the very basics that could become a crisis for the area in the near future.

Although the membership seems to have an odd mix of seemingly opposite interests - unions and businesses, young and old, wealthy and working class - the board members maintained that they can work together on common goals.

Favour, for example, pointed out that police fight crime, but the biggest crime fighters are good jobs. That, Vaughn chimed in, is why the building trades should push to find more construction jobs for minorities and women. Businesses can work with the unions and city government to make that happen, they maintained.

The exact role the coalition might play in elections or referendums is still evolving, they said. It has been formed as a so-called 501c(4) organization, which will allow it to engage in political activity. Just how will be decided as the membership continues to grow and permanent directors are elected.

Roger Putnam, the former TV newsman, and Tim Roby, who worked for former Gov. Scott McCallum, now together as Putnam-Roby Communications, were the catalyst behind the Common Sense Coalition. It took off because a lot of people in Dane County felt there was a better way than constantly "fighting like tribes," said Munoz, who is serving as the coalition's interim president.

Just what impact the coalition may have on local government and how it will go about achieving it are yet to be seen. But there's a sincerity here that may just make it work for the benefit of all.