

Oro Valley Annexation of State Trust Land

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Is Oro Valley annexation a great plan between the State Land Department and Oro Valley? The plan was unfolded on January 22 in Oro Valley's council chamber before a packed crowd of concerned residents.

Prior to the formal presentations, Mayor Paul Loomis made the statement that no studies have been conducted on the traffic and water impact on Oro Valley and Oracle Road

Michele Muench of the Arizona State Land Department opened up the meeting with a comment that this project will have 68% of land reserved for open space, which meets the Pima County's Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan recommendations. She stated that this annexation was being proposed for economic reasons for Oro Valley.

The vehicle for this project is called the Arroyo Grande Conceptual Plan. What is not known is what percentage of the land in question is not suitable for building. Oro Valley does not have a Conservation Lands System; therefore, in the view of some, the 68% assigned to open space could be reduced to 30%.

Charlie Deans from the consulting firm "Community by Designs" made the formal presentation for the Arroyo Grande Conceptual Plan and included such items as vegetation, drainage, slope, and percentage of land use by category. He assured the audience that the open corridor for wild life was adequate.

The land under consideration extends north from the border of Oro Valley and stops at the Pima County Line. The eastern border of annexation would stop at Oracle Road and would be adjacent to Catalina (14 Square miles). This conceptual Plan calls for the influx of 15,900 homes, which would increase the population of Oro Valley by 38,000 people. Mr. Deans stated that plans exist for a resort hotel. Typically, resort hotels prefer a golf course close to their hotel, which could present a water issue.

Planners hope to hold down the traffic issue by creating job centers inside Arroyo Grande, so residents would not be required to commute long distances. This project and others made it necessary for the regional planners to conduct studies for high-capacity transit corridors around the counties of Pinal and Pima. At this time, planners have not performed an economic feasibility study showing that this is a buildable project (that will come later in the process).

The main issues that need to be addressed are the existing water problems in Oro Valley, increased congestion of traffic, and a common agreement with Pima County. Currently, the

town of Oro Valley faces the possibility of paying \$172 million to bring in Colorado River water to relieve wells that are dropping 5.6 feet per year.

Oro Valley has yet to demonstrate how the annexation will contribute to the long-term coffers of the city. In the beginning, there will be an influx of money due to impact fees and building taxes, but in the long run, there could be an increase in real estate taxes due to the various services that must be provided.

Approach #1, "Trends," is basically a continuation of our current residential pattern, with no increase in the job to population ratio and no change in philosophy. This plan is not considered a viable alternative, primarily because it does nothing to address the very low job to population ratio. In other words, there is too little economic activity in the region, with many residents from Pima and Maricopa Counties moving here, and then commuting to jobs to the south and north of us.

Approach #2 is the "Corridor Focused Plan", concentrating larger mixed use economic and residential development activities in the western part of the county. It focuses on major transportation routes such as I-10, I-8, and the proposed north/south freeway corridor. This plan maintains the rural character of the eastern part of the county north of SaddleBrooke and applies the recently adopted Pinal County Open Space and Trails Master Plan.

Approach #3, "dispersed growth", distributes economic and residential development activities throughout the County. These growth areas are connected through varying transportation alternatives. Like the "Corridor Focused Plan", this alternative also applies the recently adopted Pinal County Open Space and Trails Master Plan.

Each of us in attendance was asked to fill out a bar code grid indicating which of the alternatives was preferred and why.

The choices included balancing very high density areas along the corridor, in order to maintain a more rural character to the east or, alternatively, dispersing development throughout the county, with significantly more work to be done in building transportation and infrastructure systems. For some of us the choices were more blurred, with a preference for blending the options.

In discussing each of the alternatives, Peggy Fiandaca, the President of Partners for Strategic Action, noted that the Pinal County population will soon be as big as Pima's (our square footage is approximately the same as Connecticut's). She told us that we must choose our future: Do we want to be a "Mega Drive-through" or a "Distinguishable Destination"? Accordingly to Ms. Fiandaca, if the current ratio of 160 jobs per thousand residents continues, "we will not survive."

The alternative approach gives us the public input, the tools, and the time to plan where low, mid, and high intensity activity centers should be located; how to link infrastructure and

transportation (including a new airport) to the activity centers; how to best preserve open space corridors; and, where to plan for other unique features such as medical facilities and institutions for higher education. Quality of life factors are an integral part of the planning process.

Like Rome, Pinal County will not be redesigned.”