

THE FUTURE OF THE FOOTHILLS

What changes will occur over the next 10 to 15 years?

The Catalina Foothills Association assembled a very distinguished panel of experts to address this subject at a symposium February 19, 2005 held at Foothills High School from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM. Admission was free. Salient points made by the panel members follows their introduction.

THE PANEL

MODERATOR - DR. BARBARA BECKER, DIRECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA SCHOOL OF PLANNING. Dr. Becker received her Ph.D in Community and Regional Planning and Geography from the University of Texas at Austin. Before joining the UofA faculty in 1995, Dr. Becker was Coordinator of Community and Regional Planning Programs for the Department of Geography, Geology and Planning at Southwest Missouri State University. She holds a Professional Certification from the American Institute of Certified Planners. In addition to being a prolific writer in her field, she has done numerous studies for local municipalities.

KENNETH D. ABRAHAMS, VICE PRESIDENT OF DIAMOND VENTURES responsible for all land, commercial and industrial development performed by that company, in addition to overseeing the diverse array of investments held by other Diamond enterprises. A member of the Diamond team since 1991, he has more than 20 years of experience in land development, including five years as founder and leader of his own companies. Mr. Abrahams has a B.A. and M.S. from the University of Arizona, where he specialized in landscape architecture and renewable resources.

CHUCK HUCKELBERRY, PIMA COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR SINCE 1993. A native Tucsonan, Chuck joined Pima County Government in 1974 after receiving a Master's degree in engineering from the University of Arizona. Under his leadership Pima County has been at the forefront in Urban Planning as county government seeks to balance sensible environmental policy with regional growth demands.

BRIAN JOHNSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR FOR LOEWS VENTANA CANYON RESORT. He received a Bachelor's Degree in Hotel and Restaurant Administration from the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, Nevada and an MBA from National University in San Diego, Calif. Brian is currently serving as a chairperson for the Pima Community Advisory Council, on the Board of Directors for El Dorado Hospital, on the Board for Southern Arizona Lodging and Resorts and is a member of the Southern Arizona Leadership Council.

ALBERT ELIAS, DIRECTOR, CITY OF TUCSON URBAN PLANNING & DESIGN DEPARTMENT. A native of Tucson, Albert is a graduate of the University of Arizona. After extensive experience in Tucson's Transportation Department he now heads the department whose mission is to plan the future of the city

Symposium Critique

Reprinted from CFE#7 Newsletter

The symposium on February 19th was a great opportunity, thanks to the Catalina Foothills Association, for all residents from the foothills area to hear the different points-of-view from the distinguished panel. The panel consisted of: Pima County Administrator, Chuck Huckelberry; Director of Planning, City of Tucson, Albert Elias; Business leaders Ken Abrahams, Vice-president of Diamond Ventures and Brian Johnson, Managing Director for Loews Ventana Canyon Resort; and Moderator, Dr Barbara Becker. A few of the subjects brought up by the panelists were water, transportation, taxes (county vs. city), annexation, growth, and the preservation of our area.

The majority of the panel viewed the area as being built-out; there would always be change, but it would be subtle change.

Ken Abrahams stated, even subtle changes aren't so subtle when they are close to you. Both Ken and Chuck Huckelberry agreed that the growth of the area in the past thirty years was based on agreements that took place in the 50's. This consisted of a density plan and bulls-eye development plan for the major intersections. Brian Johnson said the next change came when resort developments were marketed in the area. Ken referred to the foothills area as the "beach front property of Tucson" and it is in demand. Government, the market, and the change in demographics will all govern what will evolve. The foothills are unique for its location and environment. With the market demand, the values have changed dramatically and will continue to change.

Brian Johnson said that there is always the fear of change and growth. We need the private and public sector to work together to ensure the health of our community because without change you get stagnant. It is a concern not just for business, but all who are in the area in general; to stop economic growth is damaging to the communities' health.

Change can be a concern for local neighborhoods. Ken Abrahams felt that with continued property values going up, there will be an out-valuing of the existing structures on these properties with the result showing in subdivisions and teardowns. It was felt that the foothills area will see more re-development. To ensure how you want your neighborhood to evolve/redevelop, it is important that residents and government cooperate on managing that change.

Chuck Huckelberry expressed concern that government cannot govern each individual neighborhoods' desires; but there must be an effort to protect and not extinguish the environment that we have. Ken Abrahams stressed that on a neighborhood level it is vital that CC&R's and Architectural Guidelines continue to be enforced. These constitute the only vital way for residents to control what happens in their neighborhoods.

The panelists agreed that issues that everyone will need to address on a larger scale are water and transportation. The issue of water will be an ongoing effort at all governmental levels to work cohesively with the growth and demand. The same is true with transportation. Both, Albert Elias and Chuck Huckelberry, expressed concerns that transportation needs are a factor for both county and city government. Planning on all governmental levels is essential to meet the rapid growth in the area and the need to move cars.

Ken Abrahams stated you cannot simply put a band aid on this hemorrhaging problem. The deci-

sions made about transportation will have an impact in the foothills. Planning for immediate problems and the need to develop foresight of future needs is essential, and the involvement at all levels, private and public, is necessary for success.

There were a number of questions from the floor about, density, growth, parks, environmental issues, competition between Pima County and the City of Tucson, taxes and annexation. One of the biggest concerns in the foothills is annexation. Even though Albert Elias expressed that the city is not looking to swallow up the foothills area and that their efforts have recently been to annex areas south and south-east of Tucson, money is still the driving force. He stated that the process is a very democratic one, in which each individual homeowner is solicited. He stated that on the city's web site you can find the process and information on annexation. (www.com). An area is only solicited if it is adjacent to an already annexed area. This is a real concern to Cat 7 homeowners as we are adjacent to Riverview Estates that was annexed by the city.

Albert Elias felt that the individual homeowners would gain through better police and fire service and it would also allow for a voice in the election and function of City government. Chuck Huckelberry felt there is not much gain even if the sell is to combine like services, and the trade-off financially for the individual would be minimal. Brian Johnson said he felt that the fear of annexation is not knowing the long-term outcome. Ken Abrahams voiced that each area should weigh the trade-offs very seriously prior to making any decision on annexation.

The symposium gave residents of the foothills an opportunity to hear the commentaries on the Future of the Foothills and to voice our concerns. Thanks again to the Catalina Foothills Association for its hard work. If one thing was clear from what the panelists said, it was that you should be involved with the process. What happens in the future is a conscience decision that we all should take part in.