

## **Pinal seeks a new image**

### **County won't echo Pima and Maricopa as population heads for 1 million**

By Brian J. Pedersen, Arizona Daily Star

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CASA GRANDE — As it stands now, Pinal County serves mostly as a way station between Phoenix and Tucson where travelers can stop off for gas, a hot dog and maybe a frosty beverage.

But with its population expected to top 1 million in the next 30 years, county officials are hoping to create a new image, one that is independent of how growth has been dealt with in Pima and Maricopa counties.

"Pinal County can just be a part of it all and look like the rest, or it can be a destination point," said Sadie Smith, a member of the Pinal County Board of Supervisors. "We choose the latter."

To ensure this identity change, county officials are in the midst of updating its comprehensive plan to make sure growth is handled properly.

A cornerstone of the Pinal County Comprehensive Plan Update is "The Future at Pinal: Making Choices, Making Places," a study by Arizona State University's Morrison Institute of Public Policy.

The study, which was formally presented last week to a standing-room-only crowd of area community and business leaders, looks at how Pinal can fit into the Sun Corridor, the name given to the area between Wickenburg and Nogales that is expected to be home to 10 million people by 2040.

Morrison Institute senior research fellow Grady Gammage Jr. said the report, which cost \$272,000 and took six months to conduct, is meant to serve as a blueprint for county officials and those from Pinal's nine incorporated cities and towns. The report includes suggestions on how these governments can work together, if they choose, to give Pinal a distinct identity.

"It's time to choose between being a McMega drive-through or a distinguishable destination," Gammage said.

The report outlines six goals for Pinal County to deal with issues such as preserving open space, creating employment centers to keep jobs close to home, developing transportation and mobility options, and finding ways to allow each community to have its own uniqueness while still adhering to some areawide standards.

The study also suggests 17 "cool tools" for implementing these goals, including adopting a countywide "green" building code and creating a three-county transportation plan in conjunction with Pima and Maricopa counties. Gammage said the plan would be similar to the Central Arizona Project, which brought water to the region.

"This is really supposed to be a background document that is meant to be provocative," Gammage said.

Pinal County officials have been laying the groundwork for an update of its comprehensive plan since March, when officials began what they expect to be a 15-month process before adopting an official plan change. The next step in that process is a series of public "road shows" for residents throughout the county to hear about the plan changes and ask questions.

"We can all agree that what will happen in the future is different than what is happening today," said Peggy Fiandaca of Partners for Strategic Action, a consulting firm hired by Pinal County to help update the comprehensive plan. "If Pinal County doesn't do it right, I think it's going to affect the entire state of Arizona."

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