The Apache Junction City Council will decide whether to put $120,000 of taxpayer money into a fund to finance a vast land planning process for Superstition Vistas.

Pinal County Supervisor Sandie Smith and President of the East Valley Partnership Roc Arnett urged the City Council during a work session June 4 to contribute $40,000 over the next three fiscal years to ensure a place in the $2 million planning process.

Mr. Arnett said the money will go toward the study, including recruitment of senior project consultants and directors responsible for planning the land, estimated to equal the size of Mesa, Chandler, Gilbert and Tempe and draw at least 800,000 people to the area.

"Frankly there are not many people in the world who has planned this size of a project," Mr. Arnett said. He said several firms have already sent in proposals for the project.

While the East Valley Partnership commissioned the Morrison Institute to create a study on the potential growth of the area four years ago, City Manager George Hoffman said it was not an official land use planning study, but a collection of potential scenarios and challenges for the area.

"It was a way to think about what has not been done in the rest of the country, and really thinking through of the development of 275-square miles and doing it right," Mr. Hoffman said.

Mr. Arnett said environmental, transportation and land use issues would be the focus of the study, which those with an interest in the project hope will promote a model of sustainable development for the rest of the country.

"When the State Land Department begins to sell the rest of this property, these values and ideas will be incorporated in that sale," he said.

According to Mr. Arnett, several stakeholders have committed to contributing funds for the project, including Pinal County, which will contribute $120,000 over the next three years.

"The challenge and even the threat is the state land that surrounds us," Ms. Smith said, adding 1/3 of Pinal County is state land.

Mr. Arnett said he is asking for the same amount from all surrounding communities such as Apache Junction and Queen Creek.

"We are also talking to the city of Mesa because they have an interest in this area as well," Mr. Arnett said, which drew a scoff from members of the council. Apache Junction and Mesa city officials have been embroiled in a debate when Mesa city officials voted to expand their planning area over 10.5 square miles, or 6,770 acres, from Meridian Road east to the Central Arizona Project Canal and from Ray Road
Councilman Kris Sippel asked Mr. Arnett what the city’s return benefits would be should they decide to commit funds to the planning process.

“We don’t have any guarantee that land can become Apache Junction’s,” Mr. Sippel said, adding the city would like to annex more land of Superstition Vistas in addition to 12-square miles of state land already within its jurisdiction.

Developer Jim Rhodes of Rhodes Homes took home the winning bid of $58.6 million for 1,010 acres of the first parcel of state land in December 2006, including portions within Apache Junction.

The council will vote on fund contribution for Superstition Vistas planning during a later council meeting. No date has been scheduled.

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