Pinal County consults with Oro Valley as it plans its future

By Brian P. Nanos - Explorer News
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Squeezed between rapid growth in both Pima and Maricopa counties, Pinal County finds itself in a unique situation.

“It’s like lying between two elephants, waiting for one of them to roll over,” the county’s Assistant Manager of Development Services Ken Buchanan told Oro Valley’s Town Council.

Buchanan and Pinal County Deputy Planning Director Jerry Stabley spoke at the council’s Feb. 21 meeting as part of Pinal’s comprehensive plan update. The county hopes to have a new comprehensive plan in place by the end of 2008.

Oro Valley does not extend north into Pinal County, but county officials wanted the town’s cooperation with issues, such as transportation and water usage plans, that would affect both.

Council Member Terry Parrish claimed to speak for the entire council when he said, “For me, this is an exciting time and an opportunity for us to help ourselves by helping you.”

These meetings with towns in and around Pinal County are one of the early steps in what will be a complex, two-year procedure for the county.

“It appears that we’re rushing,” Buchanan said. “That’s because we are. It’s not a marathon, it’s a sprint.”

He estimates that during the next 18 months his staff will have 100 public meetings.

Last November, the county contracted Arizona State University’s Morrison Institute for Public Policy to create a research paper titled, “Future Tense: Issues and Ideas for Pinal County.”

The paper, which will be completed in June, will combine analysis of current and future trends with interviews of local officials and public opinion polls to create a vision for the future of Pinal County. Researchers from Morrison have already surveyed 600 county residents on topics, such as transportation and water conservation, but the survey results have not yet been analyzed.

The Morrison Institute has completed many similar projects, including a 2003 paper titled “Which way Scottsdale?”

J.D. Godchaux, a senior research analyst with the Pinal project, said the point of such efforts is to answer the question: “After you’ve come this far in your history, now what do you do?”

That vision created by the Morrison Institute will be the starting point for Pinal County officials to create their general plan.

According to Buchanan, the county’s revision of its general plan was spurred by the realization that the last plan, created in 2000 when Pinal’s total population was 179,727, is woefully out of date.
The county has grown approximately 10 percent in each of the last three years, and in January 2005, county estimates showed Pinal County with 240,046 residents.

In the next 25 years, county officials expect to gain at least 1 million more.

Aside from attempting to control growth in such a fast-growing area, county officials have other problems not faced by others. For example, because Pinal county doesn’t have a major metropolitan area, the county needs to combine the nine different individual plans of its individual communities.

Pinal County Estimated Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>population</th>
<th>% change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 1, 2001</td>
<td>183,205</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 1, 2002</td>
<td>188,896</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 1, 2003</td>
<td>196,643</td>
<td>4.1 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 1, 2004</td>
<td>216,934</td>
<td>10.31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 1, 2005</td>
<td>240,046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 1, 2006</td>
<td>267,142</td>
<td>11.29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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source: Central Arizona Association of Governments