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Annexations making CG much bigger
Questions raised about costs

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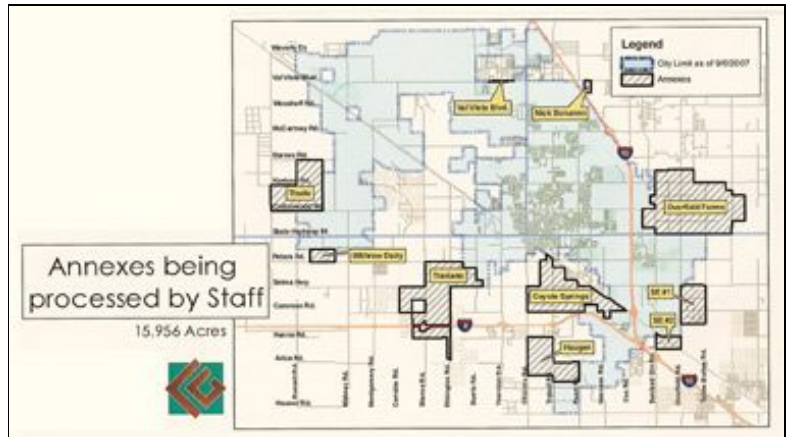
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City of Casa Grande, This city planning map shows pending annexations covering 15,956 acres. On Jan. 1, 2006, Casa Grande covered 42,540 acres. A year later the number was 56,729 acres. By this Sept. 5 it had grown to 60,488. A square mile is 640 acres.

How far is too far before Casa Grande's city services are stretched too thin?

And, as Councilman Steve Miller put it, will the city become known as the County of Casa Grande?

As the city continues to fill in the open spaces, its annexations are becoming more and more distant, ranging from the pending Overfield Farms east of Toltec Buttes Road and north of Florence Boulevard to Thude, east and west of Russell Road, out by Stanfield.

During last Tuesday night's City Council meeting, the Traviano annexation proposal - 3,527 acres between Burriss and Corrales roads and north and south of Interstate 8 - was presented and gained a preliminary nod.

Planning and Development Director Rick Miller said Omega Management Services of Scottsdale controls 2,194 of the acres and has been joined by other landowners wishing to be annexed.

"This property owner has been working with the county over the past couple of years, actually, on a very large development plan," Director Miller said. "They

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held discussions, they were directed to meet with city of Casa Grande representatives to see if we would be able to better serve their development needs in this area in the future, so that's why they're here at this point requesting an annexation."

Councilman Miller wasn't so sure the annexation would be a good deal in the short term.

"I just want to voice something here on all these annexations," he said. "I certainly understand probably our desire to try and bring as much as we can into the city to have some control, but it seems like we're reaching out farther and farther."

With this annexation request, he continued, "It just is out there so far. I feel like it's kind of turning into the County of Casa Grande. We're ending up with so much rural area and then trying to maintain that and deliver services out to those areas, everything. If we do annex it, if there is a fire, we need to send the police and fire into those areas."

It will probably be years before the property is developed enough to bring in substantial taxes or other income to the city, he said, adding, "I do understand why we might want to control it, but I am concerned about what it costs us to bring in these areas and then maintain them for many years before they ever develop or ever generate any kind of revenue. That's a thought I had, I wanted to share it."

A city planning map shows that on Jan. 1, 2006, Casa Grande covered 42,540 acres. A year later the number was 56,729 acres. By this Sept. 5 it had grown to 60,488 acres. Pending annexations cover another 15,956 acres. A square mile is 640 acres.

Councilman Miller had an excellent thought and excellent concerns, Director Miller told the council.

"This area is in our planning area boundary and I think one of the primary things we need to focus on is the strategic location on the interstate, I-8, with the interchange," he said.

Councilman Karl Peterson noted that the area is one the city has hoped would be a major employment area and asked if the owners had been so advised.

"Absolutely," Director Miller responded. "The primary focus of all our discussions with them is that the I-8 corridor represents a very excellent economic development center for retail and industrial, and their plans are going to demonstrate that."

He said the property "is predominately vacant right now," meaning that the cost of providing city services would be less than when the area is fully developed, both with retail, industrial and residential areas.

"It's probably better suited for us to annex and plan for that infrastructure and try to provide those services," he said.

Councilman Miller said that perhaps the preannexation agreement that would be signed could soften some of the costs to the city.

That is being taken into consideration, City Manager Jim Thompson said.

"This is a large parcel, obviously, and a distance to where some of our current



infrastructure lies," he told the council. "Further, it does have a wash running through it, so there are drainage issues associated with it that we will need to address. This way at least it's a larger group addressing it rather than individual parcels along the way."

Thompson said that in areas such as this and other outlying proposals for the future "we are going to look at some stipulations to timeline for improvements and costs associated with it. We have addressed a few of those in the past and the development agreements are operational with voluntary fees as such. But we're going to take that further and actually start stipulations associated with timelines before development can occur.

"Otherwise, you are right, it is not from a financial standpoint a positive. If we see that development occurs, we're having to provide that service without any of the impact fees or voluntary fees coming to the table. It is a long period of time until they actually start, so we want to shrink that down and make sure that we are allowed either escalation clauses or that they perform on a timeline. We are looking at those stipulations with those agreements."

Councilwoman Mary Kortsen asked if the police and fire departments had been consulted, "because they could potentially be very impacted on this until there is more development."

All development agreements are reviewed by appropriate city staff personnel, Thompson said, adding, "We have also had meetings at which the Fire Department has attended with this developer. There were discussions, so they did have the opportunity to engage.

"Our most recent development agreements, our larger ones, have had voluntary fees. Those voluntary fees are associated strictly with police and fire, public safety, not any other department."

Director Miller said he believes there are some existing occupied dwellings in the area. Those would have to be served by the police and fire departments. Casa Grande's fourth fire station will be built somewhere in the northern part of town, meaning that the closest station would be Station 1 at Florence Street and Florence Boulevard.

Councilman Dick Powell said that because of the present development slump, projects across the area could be idle for some time.

"I think that's why it's so important in development agreements that we kind of tie them down to a certain time, performance period, and may say they need to come back and revisit current standards if they rebuild, if they start to build at a later date or don't come through on what their plans are," he told the council.

Director Miller said the city has received a preliminary draft of the preannexation development agreement, which will be brought to the council when final details are worked out.

Powell continued, "I know with a lot of these big acreages, we could be looking at 20 years, 30 years before some of them actually start. They may happen faster, but there's a lot all over Arizona that are sitting out there that it will be quite a long time until they really lay bricks and do something about them.

"So I think to address some of Councilman Miller's concerns, we need in our development agreements to kind of tie that down and if it stays out there that long to make sure they come in under more current diversity standards than what would be in place right now if they don't build within a certain time period."

Those are excellent points, Director Miller said.

"I think, once again, one of the centerpieces of this development that probably provides us the most interest is the large retail and employment advantages that this site has along the interstate corridor, along the CANAMEX Corridor. That certainly is one of the reasons why we want to carefully entertain this."

The CANAMEX Corridor is a route for moving trade goods from Canada through the United States to Mexico. In Arizona it runs from Hoover Dam to Kingman and Phoenix, then on I-10 to Nogales. Interstate 8 would be a connecting link from California.

The council voted unanimously to proceed with the annexation work.

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