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ARCHIVES: MARANA

Marana's growth could spill into southern Pinal County

By Ryan J. Stanton, rstanton@Explorernews.com

August 3, 2005 - A new development in northern Marana that's being referred to as "The Zipprich Project" has Marana and Pinal County officials pondering the idea of a new Interstate 10 interchange, construction of a new sewer plant and an extension of the town's boundaries across county lines.

Otherwise known as The Villages at Tortolita Mountain Ranch, The Zipprich Project is a 6,500- to 7,000-home residential development that town officials say calls for a new traffic interchange replacing the existing Pinal Airpark interchange.

So far, developer Mike Zipprich has submitted only initial plans to the town, which were drafted in March, but the project has since increased in scope as the developer has acquired additional land, town officials say.

About 80 percent of the 1,895-acre site, east of Interstate 10, is in Marana, while about 360 acres lie in Pinal County, where a sewer plant is expected to be built as part of the development. Town officials say annexing a portion of the project in Pinal County is something that could be discussed in the near future. Marana's town boundaries currently end where Pima and Pinal counties meet.

Conceptual drawings of the large master-planned community detail a mixture of residential densities including a community core with blocks set aside for commercial development. Planning Director Barbara Berlin said plans submitted to the town were given a cursory review by town staff but some issues need to be addressed before any resubmitted plans are approved.

"Conceptually, it's very exciting," she said. "But the first draft really didn't reflect what was described fully by the developer. It's a huge project. It's got a lot that needs to happen with it before it's anywhere near going to the Planning and Zoning Commission. The infrastructure needs are enormous on this one. It's another new town, basically."

Zipprich, who has been in the real estate business for about 30 years, has specialized

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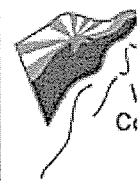
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in developing master-planned communities throughout the state, including in Buckeye, Phoenix, Coolidge, Casa Grande and Surprise. Through his Scottsdale-based company, the Zipprich Group, and INCA Capital, Zipprich has set up the company Marana 542 LLC to develop the project in Marana.

A 1976 graduate of Marana High School, Zipprich admits his latest project is somewhat of a homecoming venture.

"It was sort of a little deal to go back down to where I finished high school and start something down there, but I didn't think it was going to be this big," said Zipprich, who now lives in Paradise Valley. "It's going to be quite incredible. It's going to be a medium-density type of community, upper-scale, lots of landscaping. There's nothing in Marana built like this."

By "flying" a roadway over the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks from a new interchange, Zipprich said he hopes to tie the new community into Marana's town core and plans to have homes under construction by mid-2007.

"I think this will change the entire complexion of what Marana will look like in the future," he said. "It will be a real family-oriented, live-work-and-play atmosphere, as well as solve a lot of regional issues that are going to come a lot sooner than expected. I think it will be the flagship of Marana. It's going to be the entrance to Marana, that's for sure."

Berlin said the existing Pinal Airpark interchange is inadequate to meet the future needs of the area and a new interchange south of the existing one would be a good possible replacement. Zipprich said he's received positive feedback on his proposal from both Marana and Pinal County officials and he thinks state and federal highway officials will support the idea of a new interchange.

Zipprich hopes to have the new sewer plant built in 2007 and have the interchange underway by 2008 or 2009. As part of a development he's working on in Buckeye, his group is expanding a wastewater treatment facility up to 9 million gallons, he said.

A new sewer plant along the southern Pinal County line would serve the needs of the entire development and potentially extend downward into the San Lucas development in Marana, giving the town additional sewer capacity that will be needed as the Ina Road plant is running out of capacity, Berlin said.

Conceptual plans for The Villages at Tortolita Mountain Ranch show several reclamation lakes woven into the fabric of the community that would be a part of the wastewater system. All of the wash areas within the project are being preserved, as well as an almost 50-acre site for an archeological park where The Marana Mound protrudes into the property.

Negotiations regarding what type of commercial development will be included in the project are still being worked out, but Zipprich said there will be enough commercial development and schools to meet the needs of the community.

There are currently no existing roadways or structures on the land, which is mostly natural desert and vacant farmland with sparse vegetation. Meandering trails are shown throughout the property in conceptual drawings with upscale entryways greeting visitors.

With development creeping into Pinal County from almost every direction, including along Interstate 10, it's inevitable that Marana's growth will spill across the county line, said Ken Buchanan, Pinal County's assistant manager for development services.

One of the top 10 fastest growing counties in the United States, Pinal County is expected to see 12,000 new homes within its boundaries before the end of this fiscal year, Buchanan said. With cities such as Queen Creek already straddling the Pinal and Maricopa county line, it's nothing new for Pinal County to deal with growth into its political jurisdiction.

"Political boundaries mean nothing; it ought to be seamless when we're talking about growth," he said, "and that's something we're trying to work toward."

Developers have projected building homes along the I-10 corridor in southern Pinal County by the thousands in recent years. Scottsdale-based Johnson International had





planned on building 67,000 homes on more than 19,000 acres just north of the Ironwood Forest National Monument before the developer drew criticism from environmentalists and a host of federal and state officials and had the project rejected by the Pinal County Board of Supervisors. The land has since been sold to the Tempe-based Wolfswinkel Group, which is expected to develop a scaled-back version of the proposed community known as La Osa Ranch.

Pinal County Supervisor Lionel Ruiz has spearheaded efforts to meet with other local government officials regarding management of growth-related issues, including infrastructure needs in southern Pinal County, Buchanan said. Talks between Pinal County and Marana officials regarding construction of a new interchange that would replace the Pinal Airpark interchange have been happening for the past year, he said.

"It's phenomenal to see the type of growth that's occurred in the past 25 years between the Tucson and Phoenix metro areas," said Buchanan, a Pinal County native. "There are some growth management issues that we're trying to address."

During a special town council meeting last week, Berlin presented a map to council members detailing 89 active development projects in Marana that are either in process or pending approval. Gladden Farms was so successful that its developers are going to build Gladden Farms II north of Tangerine Road between Patton and Postvale roads.

South of Tangerine Road and farther east, Cottonwood Properties is planning a new commercial development. Immediately west of The Zipprich Project, another site lies tucked between the interstate and the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, where an industrial development is being planned.

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