



West Valley View

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Goodyear annexes Sonoran Valley

67 square miles added to city's planning area

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staff writers

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DAILY UPDATE

Goodyear City Manager Stephen Cleveland has called it controlling the city's destiny.

Goodyear Planning and Zoning Commissioner Gabriel Bey called it a "visionary move."

P&Z Commissioner Gary Gelzer "reluctantly" voted in favor of it, admitting the positives outweigh the negatives.

On Monday, the Goodyear City Council put its final seal of approval on the annexation of 67 squares miles known as the Sonoran Valley, directly south of the city's previous planning area.

The annexation creates a 200-square-mile planning area for the city - the largest in the West Valley next to Buckeye, which encompasses 700 square miles.

Housing development

The council also approved a development agreement with Montage Holdings, which is planning a 690-acre development called Amaranth.

However, the approval came with a contingency - city staff's confirmation of efficient financial resources.

The council wants to review the developer's books and partnership agreement to ensure its "financial resources are committed contractually to the success of the operation," Mayor Jim Cavanaugh said.

"The development agreement is a contract between two parties, and there's good faith on both sides," Community Development Director Harvey Krauss said. "There are no guarantees with a development agreement. When the city annexes property, we're pretty much in the forever business. So when we annex it, it's forever."

"Although I trust you, that doesn't do anything for the citizens," Cavanaugh told Montage Holdings' CEO, Garth Weiger. "If something does go wrong, we don't want to be the one with a problem that has to be solved. This would be huge. This is a bigger problem than Anthem and Verrado."

The first phase of the community will be near the Pinal County line on the north side of State Route 238.

Montage Holdings owns 10,000 acres in the Sonoran Valley. The remaining land is privately owned, Bureau of Land Management land and State Trust land. About 50 percent of the area is BLM land and will remain open space, Krauss said.

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finishes road repairs, introduces fire, police and wastewater services and builds residential, retail and commercial units.

"The Mobile community has been happy and content to be small for many decades, and we also realize that change is on the way," said Kit Wood, superintendent of the Mobile Elementary School District, which has 25 students and covers 250 square miles. "We know there are going to be many growth and opportunities for children, for young people and for families with the development that is coming on board."

Eighty-four people live in the annexed area and the city would rely on the developers to extend utilities, construct roadways from the city's existing infrastructure, improve roads to city standards and develop fire and police stations, Krauss said. The city will provide basic services on a contract basis. The Maricopa County Sheriff's Office will handle law enforcement issues in the interim.

Providing fire service

The council is worried about being able to provide adequate fire service to current and future residents within the annexed area.

"We acknowledge that we are moving into a very rural area and we are providing a level of service that is somewhat commensurate to that rural service delivery," Goodyear Fire Chief Mark Gaillard said.

For the next 12 months, Goodyear will provide two firefighters for the area every 24 hours until eight qualified emergency medical technicians can be hired. A modular building with an emergency generator and a shade structure for a fire vehicle will be built.

"It's daunting, and we certainly are doing our best with your leadership to make the best of the situation, and Goodyear firefighters will respond," Gaillard told the council.

Cavanaugh said he was also uneasy about the morale of the firefighters assigned to cover the rural area.

A firefighter would complete a normal shift at one of Goodyear's current stations and then drive down to the newly annexed section for another 24-hour shift.

"We've had dialogue with our labor group, and my conversation with them has been candid," Gaillard said. "Nobody's asking me whether this annexation is a good idea or not. We're here to prepare for it. If the City Council says that's in the city of Goodyear, then our job is to serve it and we'll figure out ways to do that."

Roads to the future

There are about 38 miles of unpaved roads and less than three miles of paved roads in the annexed area. Montage Holdings will pay for and develop the necessary roadways and then dedicate them to the city, Krauss said.

The developer is also responsible for the construction of a 15-mile, two-lane road extending from Rainbow Valley Road at Riggs Road to State Route 238. It should be complete within two to three years.

One of the main reasons Goodyear pursued annexation of the Sonoran Valley was to secure a southern ingress and egress for residents. The city will be in a position to provide for and protect a transportation corridor for the extension of the 303 Freeway south of Goodyear to a possible connection to Interstate 8, as well, Krauss said.

"If we're going to move people around, we're going to need some transportation corridors," Cleveland said.

Nearly 4,000 acres have been designated for employment use, Krauss said.

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