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Marana mayor to unveil coming changes in next week's State of the Town address

By Aaron Mackey

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Hang on to your hats, Maranans — the next two years are going to be unlike anything you've ever seen before.

Shopping malls will rise from farm fields, posh resorts will open, and new interchanges will stretch across Interstate 10.

Town leaders' long-planned ideas will make their way off the drawing board and into reality over the next 24 months, Mayor Ed Honea plans to announce next week during his annual State of the Town address.

The construction plans, along with developing areas around the town's municipal complex, will be key to the town's future, Honea said.

With increased development, transportation will take on new meaning, especially with the town straddling I-10.

A new interchange north of Trico-Marana Road will be built by developers who are planning to construct 6,500 homes.

When completed, the development, called the Villages of Tortolita, will jut into Pinal County and feature shops, parks, apartments and office space.

Residents should finally see the beginnings of construction on the Twin Peaks interchange, too, Honea said.

The project has been slated for construction since 2005 and talked about for years before that. The project was delayed while funding was found but also because there are so many different parties involved in the planning, including Union Pacific Railroad.

If you go ...

What: The Marana State of the Town address, which requires a \$40 reservation to attend.

When: 11:15 a.m. April 19.

Where: Stardance Center at Lazy K Bar Ranch, 8401 N. Scenic Drive.

The event is sold out, but people can call the Marana Chamber of Commerce at 682-4314 to be placed on a waiting list.

"It's not as easy as people think," Honea said of building the interchange. "Seven or eight groups have their hands in the pie."

The \$90 million interchange will be paid for with state funds, RTA money and local bonds.

Just as work begins on the interchange, the planned Westcor mall at Tangerine Road and I-10 should be opening, Honea said.

The proposed 295-acre site could have a mix of department stores, specialty shops and an auto mall, according to Westcor.

Nearby in Dove Mountain, Ritz-Carlton should open its resort at about the same time.

Economic prosperity also will take on a new focus as the town works with Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities Inc., the regional economic planning group, to help develop land near Marana Regional Airport.

That project is just getting under way as officials from TREO and the town begin to flesh out how to develop industry around the airport, said Nancy Smith, TREO's vice president for strategic services.

By luring industry and larger businesses to Marana, Honea hopes to create a work force that can afford to live in town, considering the median price of houses sold there is more than \$300,000.

With the influx of new residents comes the need not only for roads, but also for places for people to relax, Honea said.

That includes construction of a park and a library near Continental Ranch. Crews have already started working on bank protection along the Santa Cruz River in preparation for the park.

When finished, the park will sit next to the Wheeler T. Abbett Library, named after a former Marana Planning Commission chairman who donated \$1 million to the library for books.

"Things are really looking up," Honea said. "It's starting to fall into place here."

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