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Top Stories

'Substantial and sustained growth' in Pinal

By: Susan Randall, Staff Writer

June 21, 2007

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Goal is to make it 'sustainable' CAC board members told



Staff file photo by Oscar Perez, Rapid growth in Pinal County has meant new subdivisions rising all around, in cities and outside them.

By SUSAN RANDALL

Staff Writer

SIGNAL PEAK - Pinal County is experiencing "substantial and sustained growth," even in the midst of years-long drought, County Supervisor David Snider told the Central Arizona College Governing Board Tuesday.

"We need to work with our partners so we build sustainable growth," he said.

The county's population has roughly doubled since the 2000 census, he said. And some areas are growing even faster.

The city of Maricopa, which had 1,400 resident in 2000, had 16,000 residents by the 2005 mid-decade census.

"That's the kind of growth we're facing," Snider said.

Much of the growth in western Pinal County has been in its incorporated cities and towns, he said. But there are lots of plans and plats for unincorporated areas.

County Manager Terry Doolittle said the county is 5,386 square miles in size - larger than the state of Connecticut. And it was the sixth-fastest-growing county in the United States in 2006. (Maricopa County was No. 1 with 130,000 new residents in a year.)

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Pinal County's population was roughly 91,000 in 1980 and 181,000 in 2000, he said. In January, the Central Arizona Association of Governments estimated the population at 313,000, and it is expected to reach 1.2 million by 2025.

Twenty-five percent of the land in Pinal County is privately owned, Doolittle said. Another 35 percent is state trust land, which may be sold someday to support the state's schools. How much state trust land will be "built out" in the future is unknown, he said.

Pinal County also is located in the heart of what planners call the Sun Corridor Megalopolis, which runs along Interstate 10 through Maricopa County, western Pinal County and Pima County.

This corridor, which had roughly 5 million residents in 2000, is expected to have 11.2 million residents by 2030.

One of the problems created by such rapid growth is the pressure on I-10, which has become more and more congested. And a lack of jobs in Pinal County puts more residents on I-10 to commute to work.

"We want to preserve job centers in Pinal County," Doolittle said. "Job centers are designated areas within our municipalities and unincorporated areas that preserve land for industrial usage and office suites, so when people commute, the commute is local and not to and from the greater Phoenix area."

Pinal County hired the Morrison Institute to hold focus groups, do interviews and create a visioning document to guide the comprehensive plan update and other county planning initiatives.

One hundred meetings are planned across the county, Doolittle said, to gather suggestions to complete a visioning plan that the Board of Supervisors can adopt in 2008.

The Pinal supervisors also adopted development impact fees, he said. The Pinal Trails Master Plan and the open space master plan will be completed in October. A small area transportation plan is complete. Subdivision standards and the zoning code are being revised. The county is continuing to develop its geographic information system. A countywide flood drainage study is 75 percent complete. The county is finalizing its master facility plan. And Pinal County officials worked to give the central and western part of the county its own designation as Area C, to differentiate it from Maricopa County when measuring air pollution.

There also will be a second Pinal County Transportation Summit Aug. 7 at Ak-Chin to identify right-of-way corridors for a Pinal County Regional Transportation Plan.

Board member Rick Gibson said CAC wants to be a partner in the economic development of Pinal County.

Snider said CAC is a key player in the visioning process and in building the educated work force needed for economic development.

Coolidge City Manager Robert Flatley said that city used to be a thriving commercial center until I-10 was built. Now a new north-south freeway in the Arizona Department of Transportation general plan may run from U.S. 60 to I-10 through Apache Junction, Florence and Coolidge and bring business back.

Coolidge Mayor Tom Shope said Coolidge is not growing as fast as some of its neighbors. And that is OK, because the slower growth allows the building of infrastructure like a recent sewer plant expansion, the revitalization of the downtown and construction of its first sports complex and a new K-8 school.



The major challenges are still transportation and jobs, he added.

"It is absurd to think we could have 150,000 people living in Coolidge without jobs."

Coolidge Growth Management Director Alton Bruce said the city limits covered 7 square miles in 1999. Today they cover 51.2 square miles.

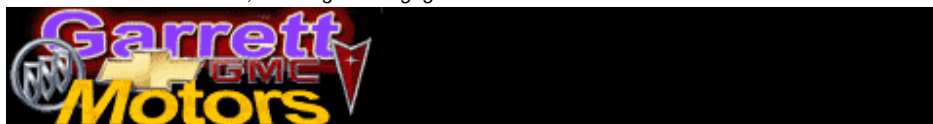
The question is how to pay for new roads.

"The federal government is not writing checks for roads anymore."

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