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CG beginning work on new plan early

By HAROLD KITCHING, Staff Writer

March 11, 2008

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Casa Grande has taken the first steps on the road to an updated General Plan, the road map of the city's future.

State law requires that such plans be updated every 10 years, but because of Casa Grande's rapid growth, the process has started earlier.

The plan, which must be approved by the public at a citywide election, is not zoning. It is more of a vision of where Casa Grande should be going during the next 10 years, factoring in community development based on need, existing development patterns and the desired vision of the residents.

The current General Plan, approved by voters in early 2002, is described as presenting "a comprehensive strategy for ensuring that facilities and services are able to support the physical land pattern. At the same time, it makes clear policy statements regarding the type and location of development. The key to the general plan is how it is used, because planning is a continual process."

As with the current plan, the updated version will include a land use map showing where residential, commercial and industrial development should be located and where open space should be conserved.

As the first steps, a Technical Advisory Group of mostly municipal and county officials and representatives from utility companies and a General Plan Steering Forum of city residents were appointed, holding their first meetings Feb. 28.

No decisions were made at those meetings, the time being taken up by getting a feel for what participants think of the city today, what they would like to see and what they feel is the biggest problem that will be faced in the future.

The TAG members, asked to list items from the perspective of their agencies rather than themselves, listed the biggest challenges as:

-- Bringing in developers with diversified, innovative products rather than subdivisions that all look basically the same, marketing of the area, maintaining a sense of community, growth, providing broadband Internet technology to all, traffic, other means of transportation, growing pains, finances, controlling sprawl, an educated work force, water, and sewer and roads infrastructure.

The forum members listed the biggest challenges as:

-- Maintaining a balanced city, community lifestyle, prioritizing resource use, finding a way to draw people to the city, political will/ resistance/ cohesion, planning, the rural atmosphere, utility corridors, incorporating new residents into the community, and drawing business and industry away from other cities.

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During future meetings, the one greatest challenge will be discussed.

"At this level of the exercise there wasn't really a lot of opportunity to comment on what the future vision is for the area," Planning and Development Director Rick Miller told the Casa Grande Dispatch. "That'll happen as this thing begins to move forward.

"I think this kickoff meeting was kind of an icebreaker to introduce the consultants to the steering forum and also the Technical Advisory Group, and allowed an opportunity for just some discussion, very general discussion.

"And I think as they begin to bring in the different elements of the plan, give them the meat of the plan, looking at land use and looking at historic preservation and economic development and resources, we'll really get into some deep discussion about each one of those elements as they come in."

Those elements, to be discussed by the two groups and at public meetings and hearings, are:

-- Land use, housing, historic preservation, trails and open space, environmental and air quality planning, rural development, cost of development, water and wastewater resources, transportation and circulation, economic development, growth areas, implementing the plan and amendments.

Leila DeMaree, the senior city planner, told the Planning and Zoning Commission that she considered it a good turnout for the initial meetings.

"As a matter of fact, for the steering forum we had 82 percent attendance out of the total number of members that we invited," she said. For the Technical Advisory Group it was 55 percent, although the meeting began at 3 p.m. on a workday.

"And also we had representatives from the tribal nations that came, so it was really good," she said.

DeMaree said planning staff members will be talking to students in city school districts to see who would like to attend General Plan sessions for youth.

"There are two workshops allotted for the youth during this process," she said. "There will also be five public meetings as well as five public hearings that will be coming up as part of this General Plan update.

"Our city Web site (www.casagrandeaz.gov) will include agendas, minutes of these meetings, any announcement of future meetings. Any materials that the public can access, they can go to that city Web site and go to the General Plan button. There will also be an area there where the public can provide feedback as well as comments related to the General Plan process. Also in the future there will be maps and graphics that we can put on the Web site."

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