

Council approves annexation of proposed Eloy golf resort

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With a memorandum of understanding signed last week between Global Water and the city of Eloy for the provision of water infrastructure for the eastern part of Eloy's planning area, the wheels are now turning for the development of a 930-acre golf resort off Milligan Road.



Artwork provided by Rose Law Group, Artwork provided by Rose Law Group, Conceptual drawing for commercial tourist center.

Harold Christ, who designed and developed what is now known as the Gold Canyon Resort in Gold Canyon, Ariz., is the driving force behind the Eloy project known as the Orchards at Picacho.

At the last city council meeting on Monday, Aug. 11, the parcel for the proposed resort was officially annexed into the city limits, via a property known as the Bool Property. Both are represented by real estate attorney Carolyn Oberholtzer with the Rose Law Group.

"The Bool Property was really key in getting the Orchards annexed," City Manager Joseph Blanton explained. "They put up their property. They're not developers, per se, while it's a significant piece in reaching out to the Orchards at the base of the Picacho Mountains. The Bool's property will also allow the Schuck Corporation to follow on their heels with an annexation of their 1600-acre rail served industrial park. And really the Schuck Corporation and the Orchards at Picacho are some of the driving forces of sitting down with Global."

"I believe public-private partnerships are the wave of the future for small cities on the grow," Mayor Byron Jackson later commented. "If cities and towns want to encourage growth and the same time controlling it, it's the only alternative to serve areas the city cannot. And with the eastern annexation of our planning area is a simple solution that comes with some reservation of giving up our service territory to a private entity."

Christ's Gold Canyon is an expansive golf resort community with a 24-hour fitness center, indoor and outdoor facilities for catered meetings, weddings, and a multitude of other events, as well as a day spa that offers everything from massage to hypnotherapy. The Orchards will be a similar development, as an age-restricted, retirement golf community that will run the gamut from premium luxury homes along the golf course, to town homes, timeshares, and vacation one-room or studio casitas and villas.

There will also be an extensive commercial entertainment and resort core for tourists and winter visitors alike to shop and explore. Homes will also be built with less of a "garage dominant" layout, thus promoting more of "pedestrian-friendly" atmosphere to go along with its variety of walking trails through the community.

"When a client like Harold [Christ] comes to me, it's so exciting because I can show you what he's done

somewhere else-what he did for Apache Junction is like what he's looking to do here," Oberholtzer told Council members Aug. 11. "We all know how beautiful those Picacho Foothills are, and he's really going to respect that and he knows how to do it."

The project is estimated to take three to five years for design and development before any earth is moved. Its build-out timeline is approx. 20 years.

City Council members expressed an excitement for the project, but also an acute frustration.

"Is there any way we can reduce this turnaround time? In the town of Eloy, we'd like to see something tangible going on," Councilman Joel Belloc inquired.

"A project of this magnitude and not near any existing infrastructure requires a tremendous amount of investment," Oberholtezer responded. "Twenty years for a 930-acre site to fully develop out from start to finish, where there's no infrastructure, really is the lifespan of the project. And it's not intended to be some carrot that someone's going to benefit from. It's so he can go out and secure the investment, and basically make everyone feel good."

"In this economic environment, five years is probably a very short fuse," City Attorney Stephen Cooper added. "The 20-year term of it is basically is for 20 years, but there are milestones that will not give them an extension. If they don't meet those milestones, then the agreement will basically terminate at that point."

"I think there's a frustration, that we've seen you time and time again for developmental agreements and nothing has taken place," Vice-Mayor Frank Acuna added.

"Vice-mayor, believe me, I want to be out here with a shovel so badly," Oberholtzer said. "I'm frustrated, too, because it is hard to plan and plan and plan, and I want to build, too.....but we truly are laying the foundation to absolutely seize the moment when the market comes back."

"What you did tonight with Global was really, really significant," Christ told Council members. "Because we've been mired with a kind of inability to get started. Because without the infrastructure in place, it's pretty much impossible to do a project of that nature."

"But we're excited about being in this community. It's been a pleasure to watch this town mature, and grow and working with staff. It's been a real, real team effort in putting all these things together. We thank you for that opportunity. We've done some other significant projects in kind of working our way down this way. We're in hopes that this will be the best of all."

"Everything's falling into place," City Manager Blanton concluded. "This downturn has allowed us time to put in those master plans and water and sewer, and update our general plan, and our small area transportation study. So, we are readying ourselves for when we come out of this housing slump. We will be prepared."