

August 20, 2009

Four scenarios proposed for growth in Pinal

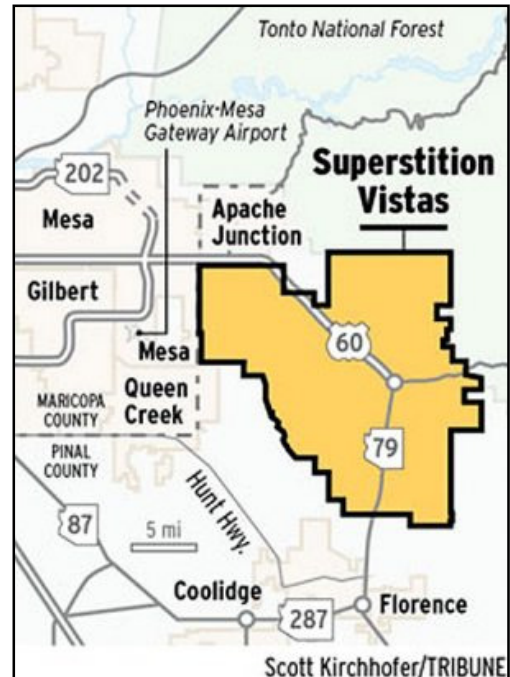
By Sonu Munshi
Tribune

Stakeholders for more than a year have been developing four master plan scenarios for the Superstition Vistas area on the Valley's eastern fringes.

Now the \$1.7 million planning effort to develop a huge swath of Pinal County - the size of Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa and Tempe - will be presented to the public next month.

The scenarios proposed are each characterized by their density of uses, reliance on mass transit, open spaces and building forms, among other criteria, each with different trade-offs.

Superstition Vistas project director Mike Hutchinson said because the 175,000 acres of land will be auctioned in chunks over many years, the goal is to do comprehensive planning in advance for the area's expected growth timeline of 50 to 100 years.



"The goal is to do sustainable development for the future, not in a piecemeal fashion," said Hutchinson, a former Mesa city manager. Instead of continuing outward sprawl that has been the epitome of Phoenix's growth pattern, planners hope to develop another almost independent, self-sustaining urban core.

Superstition Vistas is one of the last such gigantic land parcels owned by a single entity: Arizona State Land Department. The East Valley Partnership and Pinal Partnership together raised the money to plan for the area, and brought in among others, consultant Robert Grow of Utah.

The Phoenix Metropolitan region is estimated to grow from 4 million residents to between 7.4 million and 11.5 million by 2060. Of that growth, up to 1 million could call Superstition Vistas home.

For now, stakeholders have been keeping tabs on transit decisions about things like the planned 802 freeway (Williams Gateway Freeway) alignment corridor that would bisect the property.

Jim Holway, director of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and Sonoran Institute Joint Venture, who is closely involved in the project, said he views the Superstition Vistas as "a unique opportunity to develop a model on how to develop and manage quality of life with better use of resources."

Holway said there are efforts to balance the jobs to housing ratio, create activity centers and make public transit a feasible alternative to the car-dependence that defines many travel patterns in the state.

"We're trying to design and come up with ideas for Arizona citizens to react to, which is, what will this community look like in 2050 or 2060," Holway said.

But are people willing to leave the more established parts of the Valley and move to a new urban core?

"In the end it's what people want to buy and how jobs come here, so the market will decide, but we can plan more efficiently than has been done in the past," he said.

Holway, a leading authority on water management issues, said while concerns about availability of resources such as water are valid, his reply to its availability is "a qualified yes."

"Clearly we're a water-scarce region, so as a state, we have to prioritize our water-use allocation," said Holway. That means cutting water use in areas like landscaping, he noted.

Planning is only the first step. The State Land Department doesn't have the ability to adopt a master plan for its land. It's also not clear who will monitor the development once the initial parcels are sold.

Jamie Hogue, deputy land commissioner at the Arizona State Land Department, said hurdles such as future governance are an ongoing discussion. That includes thinking about whether the state department is able to or should oversee future development, whether future landowners would be obligated to follow the master plan, or whether surrounding municipalities would agree to adhere to guidelines or even the possibility of creating a municipality to oversee the area.

"It's not only a really good exercise for Arizona, it could become a national and international example of looking into the future and seeing how land use planning can be done," Hogue said.

Ninety percent of revenue generated from the state land benefits public schools in Arizona.

All the scenarios are available online, and two public meetings are set for those interested to get more information about the plans and to give feedback on their preferred alternatives.

Following these meetings, the Superstition Vistas Steering Committee - which includes representatives from Arizona State Land Department, Pinal and Maricopa Counties; Mesa, Queen Creek, Apache Junction and Salt River Project - is expected to finalize the preferred scenario into a more definitive development master plan.

For more information on the four scenarios, visit <http://superstition-vistas.org>.



© 2009 Freedom Communications / Arizona. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.

You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing

http://license.icopyright.net/3.7220?icx_id=143265 into any web browser. Freedom Communications / Arizona and East Valley/ Scottsdale Tribune logos are registered trademarks of Freedom Communications / Arizona . The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.

<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/143265>