



Published: 10.28.2007

# Towns learned hard way: Lack of early planning hurt

## They're having to hike fees now for infrastructure

By Danielle Sottosanti

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Local governments built roads and other infrastructure but, they learned through harsh experience, they didn't build fast enough or big enough to accommodate growth.

"If you don't plan on growth, you'll have what we saw in the 1970s and '80s, which is communities on the fringe with no infrastructure," said County Supervisor Sharon Bronson, who represents the Southwest Side. "We're still paying for that."

"We've learned to get the big picture taken care of first, and work back from that."

Mike Reuwsaat, Marana town manager

The area southwest of Tucson is where much of the county's growth is occurring now.

And the county may be about five years behind in that area when it comes to infrastructure, said County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry.

Earlier this year, the county commissioned a Southwest Infrastructure Plan that found the area needs \$755 million to \$906 million in new infrastructure over the next 30 years to accommodate anticipated growth.

That translates into impact fees of \$20,104 to \$50,769 per home, depending on how many homes go in. The county's current impact fees are \$4,400 per home.

Insufficient impact fees, which are fees charged to developers, have also posed problems — and been lessons — for Sahuarita and Oro Valley.

Provisions in the Rancho Sahuarita plan, which the new town's staff began to review soon after the town was incorporated in 1994, prevented Sahuarita from imposing impact fees and building moratoriums on the development for 40 years, and from making other changes to regulations relating to its growth.

"We will not necessarily allow a developer to stop us from charging development impact fees in the future. That's clearly a lesson we've learned," said Jim Stahle, Sahuarita town manager.

Councilman Charles Oldham, who's been a member of the Town Council since Sahuarita was incorporated, acknowledges that the town made some mistakes in agreeing to low sewer connection fees and user fees for Rancho Sahuarita and Rancho Resort.

Sahuarita's Town Council in August boosted connection fees by an average of 26 percent and is considering a two-step increase of an average of 74 percent in user fees.

Oro Valley hadn't increased its Alternative Water Resources Development Impact Fee since 1996. It is one of the fees developers pay to connect to the town's water system.

A study the town commissioned found that, to cover future water needs, the fee would have to jump more than 1,500 percent, from \$300 to \$4,982, for the most-common residential water meter.

The proposed increase created a wave of controversy and, to mitigate the fee hike's effect on development,

the Oro Valley Town Council decided in June to phase it in over the next five years.

Oro Valley Town Manager David Andrews said he thinks the town — and the entire region — is still catching infrastructure up to development.

"I think the growth occurred three to five years sooner than what was anticipated," he said.

For Marana, Cortaro Road was a lesson learned about dealing with increased traffic, said Town Manager Mike Reuwsaat. Cortaro was widened several times rather than all at once, and the existing version has one lane in each direction blocked off from the others by freeway support columns.

"We've learned to get the big picture taken care of first, and work back from that. We have a much better vision and staff now, to know what to expect from our interchanges," he said.

Cortaro probably will never get redone to go under or over I-10, which makes doing so at two other crossings, West Twin Peaks and West Ina roads, very important for the long-term needs of the area, he said.

The town is designing full-scale versions of the Twin Peaks and proposed Villages of Tortolita freeway interchanges, rather than building the bare minimum and then having to widen them later on, he said.

Tucson's Houghton Area Master Plan to develop 17 square miles on the Southeast Side often is cited as a way the region can master-plan large tracts of land.

The huge area runs from East Irvington Road south to Rita Ranch and the Union Pacific railroad tracks, and from South Harrison Road to roughly the Pantano Wash.

It is planned to have a huge "town center" of retail and other services in the middle of the plan, between South Houghton Road, East Poorman Road, East Valencia Road and a newly built north-south route called South Melpomene Road.

The road system will be designed to add other arterial streets that can parallel main thoroughfares such as Houghton Road to relieve traffic over time, said Tucson Planning Director Albert Elias.

For each municipality, the lessons of growth came down to one point: Seeing the forest rather than just the trees, said Oro Valley Mayor Paul Loomis.

Development affects not only a particular piece of property but also aspects all over town — whether it be roadways, water or the need for additional police, Loomis said. "You have to look at a development from all sides and the top."

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