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Editorials

Astronomers' concerns should be considered at hearing tomorrow

We know that growth is both inevitable and omnipresent in our area and that area residents are deeply concerned about its impact on the environment, on our transportation system, on our water supply, on our schools and much more.

That's why we expect to see a full house at the hearing tomorrow on the proposed Montosa Ranch development of 2,500 homes in Amado, north of Tubac on the east side of Interstate 19 about 10 miles from the Fred Lawrence Whipple Observatory atop Mount Hopkins.

To pinpoint that location more precisely, the proposed location for the Montosa Ranch is 3.3 miles south of Interstate 19's exit 48, approximately one mile east of the interstate.

The developers of this project, the Molera Alvarez Group, say they believe there's enough water for the 2,500 houses contemplated and that there will be sufficient ac-

cess to the area.

However, we have not yet heard what the developer has to say about the housing project's impact on the observatory.

Astronomers at the observatory and other opponents are justifiably concerned that the development could have an adverse effect on the work of the multi-million-dollar Smithsonian observatory and on the dark skies that keep this facility at the forefront of scientific research on the skies.

At Mount Hopkins, the Smithsonian Institution, the University of Arizona and other agencies operate at least eight telescopes, including the Multiple Mirror Telescope, one of the world's largest, with a multiple mirror 21 feet across.

Previously, during a dissent with the town of Sahuarita in 2004 about changing its lighting code to allow outdoor lighting levels at twice the amount allowed by town code, astronomers argued that if the skies become

excessively light and Whipple is forced to close, it could not relocate anywhere else in North America because of light pollution and would likely go to Chile or some other country.

The Fred Lawrence Whipple Observatory is one of the major reasons why Southern Arizona is known as the astronomy capital of the world.

Few places on Earth offer better opportunities to study the heavens than the clear skies of Southern Arizona.

In addition to important research that has worldwide implications, the observatory also offers many opportunities for public outreach and education, enabling anyone to learn about the fascinating mysteries of the stars and the planets through hands-on telescope viewing, in-depth lectures and tours of one of the world's great centers for intergalactic research.

In short, the observatory, its staff, its re-

search, and its public education programs are an invaluable asset not only to this little corner of Southern Arizona, but to the world.

Astronomers from the observatory have pledged to appear at the hearing tomorrow before the Santa Cruz County Planning and Zoning Commission on the Montosa Ranch development, which is scheduled for 1 p.m. at the De Anza RV Park on the east frontage road, just south of the Arivaca Junction Interstate 19 exit No. 48.

They have pledged to voice their concerns, which we share, and which we believe many area residents share as well.

We are willing to listen to the developers with an open mind, but hope that they have studied the situation, not only regarding water and access, but also regarding the proposed development's impact on one of Southern Arizona's most important assets, the Fred Lawrence Whipple Observatory.