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Arizona

Tucson Growth Forum Participants Frustrated by Inability to Cooperate on Regional Issues

In a Tucson *Arizona Daily Star* online survey on development, land use and water supply in this arid Sonoran Desert region, 90 percent of 3,388 respondents expressed high or some satisfaction with their personal quality of life, but 83 percent registered concerns about water, infrastructure and residential pressures; 79 percent, "not much" confidence in local governments' ability to handle the challenges effectively; and 87 percent, a wish for regional cooperation, with Harvard and University of Arizona Economics Professor Joseph P. Kalt advising a "smart growth" planning process -- free of ideology and politics -- to absorb the expected half million or more people by 2050.

The daily echoed the advice.

"We are encouraged that the Governor's Growth Cabinet is developing an Arizona Smart Growth Scorecard, which will be a tool for local governments to evaluate their ability to cope with growth and development issues," the daily said in an editorial before the subsequent "[Tucson Growth: Decision at the Crossroads](#)" forum, which brought together more than 500 city and county residents, officials, planners and other experts.

Sponsored by the University of Arizona, the Thomas R. Brown Foundation, the Communications Institute, and the daily, reports its writer Tony Davis, the forum confirmed the scope of anxiety over the question "Why can't we all get along?" and the intensity of demand for regionalism.

"This is a difficult place to get things done," observed State Land Commissioner Mark Winkelman about the Tucson area. "We deal with issues all over the state and it shouldn't be that hard."

Pima County Conservation Commission Chairman Bill Roe called the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan -- negotiated over five years by varied interest groups -- a great success for regional cooperation, but said "as I sit back and look at where we need to go now, I'm concerned about our inability to work together."

Recalling a consultant who described Tucson's area as "the most fractious" of the 60 he has worked with, the conservation commission chairman told the forum he found a diametrically different atmosphere on an instructional visit in Portland, Oregon, whose redevelopment achievements reflected all stakeholders' involvement in planning from the start.

Homebuilder John Wesley Miller agreed the community must erase its factional "line in the sand," asking listeners "to think about 'how do we come together the way we used to,' and think about what is good for our community."

With several other panelists and attendees, including Tucson Audubon Society Director Paul Green and Downtown Tucson Partnership CEO Glenn Lyons, stressing similar points, Pima County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry cited local budget shortages as the biggest obstacle for cooperation.

Each local government looks at development projects as sources of new tax revenue to pay for its operations and services, he pointed out, saying that's the model "we have to get away from" in the search for cohesive regional land-use and development policy. -- *Arizona Daily Star* 3/15/2008

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