



State of the Sahuarita 2012

Pathways: Creating Traditions, Moving Forward

By Mayor Duane Blumberg

Location and Neighbors

Today you will hear a story about the Town of Sahuarita: its present state and some possibilities for the future. To avoid keeping you for the entire afternoon, my remarks will be highly selective, focusing on economic development. This is of course only part of the Town's story, but I believe that we are at the point of important decisions for our future.

No matter what story I tell, or how long it will take, it will be only part of the story. The town of Sahuarita and the community of Green Valley, though distinct and different, are tightly linked. We share a boundary; we have multiple exits on I-19 in the southern edge of the Tucson region; there are overlapping school districts, fire districts, and water services; there is a joint chamber of commerce; and perhaps most importantly, citizens take advantage of the area's shopping,

service, recreational, and entertainment opportunities without regard to the official boundaries.

Our other nearest neighbor is the Tohono O'odham Nation with its approximately 28,000 members occupying tribal lands in southern Arizona, including the 71,000 acres of San Xavier District that borders Sahuarita to the north. We are enjoying lunch today in the beautiful Diamond Center which is an enterprise of the Tohono O'odham Nation. Sahuarita works with the district on projects of common interest such as traffic signals and improvements along Pima Mine Road.

Ancient and Modern Pathways

The ancient Hohokam created pathways to villages along the Santa Cruz River valley. In the 17th century, Juan Bautista de Anza followed the river through what is now known as Green Valley and Sahuarita on his expedition from Mexico to California. More recently, ranchers, farmers, and miners built pathways to serve agricultural and industrial needs as Arizona developed and became a state. Today we are connected locally and globally through physical pathways – bicycle paths, streets and highways, railroad lines, shipping and air routes – as well as through networks of electronic communications pathways.

These physical and virtual transportation and communications pathways serve as part of the infrastructure that supports the life of a community. There is another kind of pathway: the flow of past events that have led to today's community, and the decisions that will shape the community's future. So in the next few minutes, let's take a look at the state of our Town and some pathways that we might follow.

Town Demographics and Development

Sahuarita is young, incorporated just 18 years ago. From a small beginning, it has grown to today's 30 square miles and 25,600 residents. And this growth has been dramatic. The 2000 census counted a population of 3,200, while the 2010 census reported a population of almost 25,600!

To support this development, the town has built or acquired local pathways to connect residential and commercial areas; and larger roads to connect the Town to major highways. For example, just a few years ago Sahuarita Road was a local two-lane road. Now improvement of Sahuarita Road has been included in the regional transportation plan. Note that the old road would fit in the median of the new one. The first phase has been done, and in the next four or five years the entire project all the way to Country Club Road will be complete. By the way, the Town has plans to annex state trust land that will extend its eastern limits to Wilmot Road, a future north-south arterial.

De Anza's journey foretold the international connections of this century. Today's Interstate 19 connects Sahuarita and Green Valley to Mexico, and is a link to major highways to the rest of the United States and to Canada.

Commercial and Residential Areas

Along with growth in area and population, Sahuarita has seen growth in economic activity. There are now more than 100 businesses located in the Town, largely concentrated in the retail/service sector, and in construction and construction-related areas.

For residents, Sahuarita offers many housing opportunities including "pioneer neighborhoods" built in the 1950s, a variety of other neighborhoods, a large master-planned development with extensive landscaping and amenities, and an age-restricted "active adult" resort community.

Sahuarita is more than houses and businesses. We have six heavily used parks. Sahuarita Lake Park is a popular destination for fishing and walking or running around the lake. Two dog parks at Quail Creek Veterans Municipal Park and Anamax Park serve the needs of canines and their friends. The Town's Parks and Recreation Department organizes Fiesta Sahuarita and other seasonal festivals; and they offer numerous indoor and outdoor recreation programs for all ages. Parks and Recreation recently partnered with the United Way and Freeport McMoRan on the award-winning sensory playground at Anamax Park which is designed for children with special needs.

Town Government

The Town government is based on the Council/Manager structure. The main business of the Town government is of course to provide services to our residents, investors, and visitors. Despite the pressures of rapid growth, the Town has been able to achieve a high level of services in an efficient and financially conservative way. Sahuarita is in the enviable position of having reserves that exceed one year's general fund revenues. And the Town does not levy property taxes, nor does it assess impact fees! And, as of last week, the Town does not charge a fee for a business license!

The Current State of the Town

The State of the Town is therefore very good: an advantageous location in a major metro region, a great neighboring community, thriving businesses, a variety of neighborhoods, recreational and cultural possibilities, and effective government.

It might seem that we are at the end of the story – life is good, and we just need to continue what we have been doing. But of course it's not that easy. An economy that depends so heavily on locally driven shopping and construction is probably not sustainable. Also, the concentration of business activity in just these two sectors means that local employment opportunities are limited, and do not match well with the educational levels, training, and experience of the Town's citizens.

Town revenues depend heavily on these sectors. Sales taxes and permit fees are major funding sources for Town operations, and construction taxes help to fund capital projects.

Economic Development Goals

So there are two important goals for the Town's economic development. First, continue growth of the retail/service sector by helping existing business prosper and expand, by attracting new retail and service businesses, and by making the Town a more regional shopping destination. The second goal is diversification, especially by attracting high-wage primary companies – companies that sell their products, services, or ideas outside of the local area, and have a well-

paid workforce. Achieving these goals is more difficult than formulating them, but the broad strategy is to continue to make the Town a good place for business and investment, and then market the Town to selected business clusters.

We must manage commercial development so that Sahuarita will not have strip malls lining every major thoroughfare. There is currently a substantial retail cluster near the Duval Mine Road/I-19 intersection.

The next major area for retail and service growth will be around the Sahuarita Road/I-19 intersection. The Rancho Sahuarita Company, as part of a master planned project, has developed a large and highly successful residential subdivision, and has built the first components of a major mixed-use regional development known as the Town Center. As currently envisioned, the Town Center of several hundred acres will be devoted to retail and service businesses, entertainment venues, restaurants, offices and other commercial facilities, medical facilities, an employment center, and community recreational and social facilities. The Town Center will also include the existing municipal complex, an elementary school, an early learning center, and a competition pool. The entire development will feature integrated architecture, color palette, infrastructure, landscaping, and amenities in the Spanish colonial style found in the already completed parts of Rancho Sahuarita.

There is another major project for the future. FICO, the pecan company, is preparing plans for its Sahuarita Farms development of several thousand acres to include neighborhood and commercial centers along the banks of the Santa Cruz in Sahuarita and Green Valley. Throughout Sahuarita Farms, pedestrian and bike pathways are planned to connect neighborhoods to schools, stores, and future employment centers.

Hydronalix and Aerospace/Defense Industries

Sahuarita and Green Valley certainly do have large primary businesses in several sectors: agriculture, mining, large equipment testing. The best strategy to attract additional high wage primary businesses is to participate in regional economic development efforts. Specifically, the aerospace/defense initiative being led by TREC opens opportunities for us. Indeed, I am pleased to be able to tell you about one of the newest investors in Sahuarita, Hydronalix.

Under a contract by the U.S. Navy, Hydronalix has developed and built a special robotic boat, EMILY, for ordnance clearance operations. The company also has a contract from the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency to build ten EMILY boats to carry specialized scientific equipment into the eye of a hurricane to allow continuous monitoring of conditions. NOAA will also use EMILY boats for special health monitoring missions in national marine sanctuaries.

Hydronalix has already supported two missions to perform imaging in a glacial lake near Mount Everest. An offshore oil rig ship company has begun using EMILY boats for emergency rescue operations. Hydronalix is working with the Los Angeles County Fire Department, the Depot Bay Fire/Rescue Department in Oregon, the Mission Bay San Diego Lifeguard Station, and the Green Valley Fire District. EMILY was selected as the Grand Award Invention of the Year (Security Category) by Popular Science Magazine (2010), EMILY was ranked #7 out of the 50 top inventions for 2010 by Time Magazine, and currently EMILY is a finalist for invention of the year by Aviation Weekly Magazine for 2011.

And this company is here in Sahuarita in spite of efforts, including contacts by the mayor, to locate in Los Angeles.

Sustainable Water Supply

Early on I mentioned the wonderful connections between Sahuarita and Green Valley. Now I want to draw attention to a common problem that could severely limit our future opportunities: the need to insure a sustainable supply of water. The Upper Santa Cruz Providers and Users Group (USCPUG), has provided an invaluable service by conducting a careful study of water usage and recharge in the local part of the aquifer. The conclusion is that there is currently an annual overdraft of about 40,000 acre-feet (13 billion gallons), and that this level of overdraft can be expected to continue. Our two communities must work together and with others to find additional water that can be recharged locally.

Sun Corridor Megapolitan Area

Let's now expand our thinking, in space and time. We are in a new global economy. And Sahuarita of course is too small to have the resources to thrive in this economy by itself. The basic structures of this new economy in our country will not be cities and towns, or even states, but much larger regional structures called megapolitans. We can already see how these larger structures have evolved. For example, when I was in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin in the 1960s, O'Hare Airport was literally out in the middle of nowhere. Today the region from Chicago to Milwaukee is one powerful economic unit. Or think of the Los Angeles – San Diego corridor.

For Arizona, the projection is that the Sun Corridor --- Nogales to Tucson to Phoenix and beyond --- will emerge to be one of the most successful of these American megapolitans. A lot would be needed for this to happen: transportation infrastructure comes immediately to mind. There is also the necessity for a change in our political thinking: we must think in terms of competing with Europe, Asia, and South America instead of with each other. Maybe when the Mayor of Sahuarita gives the State of the Town presentation twenty years from now, the focus will be on Sahuarita's role in the Sun Corridor.

And the work initiated through the Imagine Greater Tucson project will help guide Sun Corridor development in accordance with the vision and values identified by the people of Sahuarita, Green Valley, and the rest of the region.

Summary

So we come to the end of our story for today. We have talked about the physical, electronic, and temporal pathways that have brought the Town of Sahuarita to its present state and may provide the way to its future. Here's what I'd like you to remember about today:

Sahuarita and Green Valley now form a community of interest of almost 50,000 people.

The current state of the Town is very good. But there is a need to create wealth through bringing "outside" money into the town: by creating a more regional shopping,

entertainment, and dining destination; and by attracting high-wage primary businesses. The Town has a plan to provide the environment to help these happen. And we will have to find ways to insure a sustainable water supply.

Economic globalization will shift competitive emphasis to megapolitan areas and megapolitan clusters. Our economic future is likely to depend on “co-opetition” with our regional neighbors.

And finally, remember that the future can be anything that we imagine it to be, but there will be surprises along the path!!



As prepared by Mayor Duane Blumberg for the State of Sahuarita Event on January 31, 2012 held at the Desert Diamond Casino.