

Arizona's Growing: Will We Grow Smarter?

By Becky Daggett

Imagine the possibility that Arizona will more than triple its population from what it was in 2000 (5.1 million) to 16 million people by the year 2050. And imagine those numbers given Arizona's current development patterns—uncoordinated, fragmenting wildlife habitat, water consumptive, and leaving behind fragmented human habitat disconnected from our workplaces, schools, and shopping.

The population scenario is based on census data, land ownership, and land use planning assumptions made by Maricopa Association of Governments in conjunction with all the other Associations of Governments in Arizona.

Although these and other similar population projections are likely to be reality, our current development patterns don't have to dictate our future.

Under the guidance of Governor Janet Napolitano, a group of Arizona citizens set out to talk to their neighbors around the state about how growth was affecting their quality of life.

The way our cities are laid out affects all parts of our lives, including how safe it is for our children to walk to school, how much interaction we have with our neighbors, and how much we spend on transportation. It's natural for us to want a say on how our city grows so we can protect what we love about it. As informed citizens, we can help keep human concerns—including concerns about Arizona's natural heritage—at the center of planning and growth discussions.

In 2004, Governor Napolitano asked the Growing Smarter Oversight Council—which I co-chair—to develop a set of Guiding Principles for Arizona's growth. The Governor intended these principles to serve as a blueprint for Arizona and be used as a tool for state agencies and local governments to coordinate a more responsible way to grow.

The council, with the invaluable help of the Community Planning Office at the Arizona Department of Commerce, traveled the state inviting citizens to share what they valued about their communities, their concerns regarding growth, and ideas for doing a better job of growth management. Twenty listening sessions were held—from Page to Nogales and Show Low to Yuma—and hundreds of Arizona residents turned out to discuss how growth affects their quality of life.

The council also hired pollster Bruce Merrill to research Arizonan's attitudes toward growth. Not surprisingly, his results reinforced the council's findings. All across Arizona, citizens said that they value the uniqueness of their chosen place to live—the locally owned businesses, the natural areas and wildlife, the schools and places of worship. They are concerned about losing this uniqueness and of running out of the resources needed to keep their economies vibrant and to maintain their high quality of life.

The council compiled all these findings in drafting its Guiding Principles (found online at www.azcommerce.com).

Once adopted, these Guiding Principles will assist Arizona, its agencies, local communities and regions by establishing a framework to:

1. Coordinate the activities of state agencies to enhance quality growth throughout Arizona in collaboration with the efforts of local communities;
2. Incorporate into other statewide plans, such as the Commerce and Economic Development Commission's 10-year Economic Strategy;
3. Guide future updates of local government general and comprehensive land use plans;
4. Highlight best management practices from around the state;
5. Develop performance criteria for state and local decision-makers to assess whether state and local land use planning goals are being accomplished.

The draft Guiding Principles were presented to Governor Napolitano in early April. She had already convened a Cabinet level growth and infrastructure group—comprised of the heads of Arizona agencies such as the Departments of Transportation, State Lands, Water Resources, Environmental Quality, Game and Fish, Housing, and Commerce—and discussions have begun about how our recommendations can inform their work and their decisions.

The 148 participants at the recent Arizona Town Hall, titled *Arizona's Rapid Growth and Development: Natural Resources and Infrastructure* endorsed these Guiding Principles.

It was heartening for me, as a Council member and Arizona Town Hall participant, to hear other participants touting our recommendations and discussing ways to put them into action in their own communities.

A summary of some of the recommendations that the Growing Smarter Oversight Council has put forward are as follows:

Preservation of Community Character

- Commission a comprehensive inventory of the natural, cultural, and historic assets of Arizona.
- Assess the funding tools available to preserve and protect Arizona's natural, cultural, and historic assets, such as the Arizona Heritage Fund.

Stewardship

- Increase state efforts to develop reliable, independent, objective, information regarding the available supply of water for each hydrologic region of Arizona.
- Assure that the availability of clean water is one of the criteria for evaluating all future land use and development plans in all areas of Arizona.

- Create the tools necessary for state and local agencies to manage and balance the current and future use of water for all municipal, industrial, commercial, agricultural, and natural purposes in all areas of Arizona.
- Work to conserve the open spaces separating Arizona's communities that define much of the character of Arizona.

Opportunity

- Develop information and expertise on a variety of approaches and practices to facilitate local communities' growth and development efforts to provide local residents a range of opportunities in housing, employment, education, and other essential services.

Infrastructure

- Ensure that state and regional planning agencies work with local communities to fully understand the regional traffic congestion impacts of proposed development.
- Adopt local government policies to ensure that residents of newly developed areas can reasonably expect that essential infrastructure, particularly transportation links, both locally and regionally, will be completed within five years.
- Plan at the state level, working with private energy providers, to ensure that reliable energy supplies, especially from sustainable energy sources, will be available to meet to Arizona's future needs.
- Amend the Growing Smarter law to require general and comprehensive plans to include policies that encourage and reward energy efficiency and greater reliance on sustainable energy sources in, at a minimum, construction standards and community development patterns.

Economic Development

- Amend the Growing Smarter law to require general and comprehensive plans to include appropriate economic development components to reflect the importance of economic opportunities in future development.
- Amend the Growing Smarter law to require general and comprehensive plans to include an evaluation of the availability of employment and housing, within a regional context for current and future residents.

Responsibility and Accountability

- Strengthen the state's capability to provide valuable guidance and assistance to local governments on managing growth and development, especially in areas experiencing rapid conversion from rural to urban or suburban form.
- Modernize and harmonize state law so that county governments are fully authorized and empowered to manage and enforce land use plans and development in the unincorporated areas of Arizona similar to the authorities of

cities within incorporated areas. For example, counties should have the authority to meaningfully manage lots splits.

- Demonstrate state agency leadership in encouraging comprehensive growth planning by coordinating their respective efforts, acting to reinforce local planning decisions, rewarding regional cooperation, and recognizing quality planning efforts through grants and incentives, similar to programs in other states.
- Examine the fiscal structure of cities and towns, their reliance on local sales tax collections, and how that reliance affects planning and development decisions.

The Growing Smarter Oversight Council realizes that our work is not done. Beginning in May, we began taking the draft principles back out to the public for comment.

Email your comments to the council at GuidingPrinciples@azcommerce.com.

Getting your direct, written comments is important to us, but I'd also like to invite you contact me at the Friends of Flagstaff's Future office if you'd like to discuss your ideas. My phone number is (928) 556-8663 and my email address is Becky@FriendsofFlagstaff.org.

I was born and raised in Arizona and I—like you—am concerned about the future of our state as well as our great city of Flagstaff. I hope that you'll continue to work with me and Friends of Flagstaff's Future on creating a solid, healthy, and vibrant future for us all.