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New Foothills route draws criticism

By Kimberly Lamke
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Community leaders in the Ahwatukee Foothills know all too well about the need for another route from their houses to Interstate 10, but some said a new city proposal doesn't quite fit their needs.

inside community

Phoenix Councilman Sal DiCiccio, who represents the Foothills, recently criticized the proposal as a member of the public, saying it was planned without community input.

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"This is just another instance where the city has kept the public out of the process," DiCiccio said. DiCiccio, who said he discussed the plan with Phoenix staff members last week, urged the Ahwatukee Village Planning Committee leadership to stand up for the community's concerns and tell the city what kind of solution it wants for the traffic problems.

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"If you don't, we'll (the community) become a pass-through town like everyone else, and we'll have the same problems and concerns as everyone else," DiCiccio said. He also said he believes the plan to be driven by political concerns and development interests.

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DiCiccio's comments were made during a recent meeting of the Village Planning Committee to review the city's proposed answer to the 85,000 residents' traffic woes -- a parkway from Interstate 10 at Pecos Road west to I-10 at 55th Avenue.

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The village government was given the proposal by city staff to study before considering the plan at the next Village Planning Meeting on July 26.

Essentially, the proposed roadway would curve around and, in part, cut into South Mountain hillsides, providing a route to relieve traffic crammed into the four access routes now available from the community to I-10. The parkway would provide a fifth way for locals to get to west Phoenix via I-10.

The area studied for the roadway is a 22-mile corridor and would traverse through parts of the Phoenix Mountains Preserve and the Gila River Indian Reservation, if built as proposed.

According to Jim Baughman, a Phoenix city planner, the proposal has been given to the Tribal Council for review.

No approval for the plan has been given.

"This plan is in no way set in stone," Baughman said. "We have a long way to go before the project could be approved for construction."

Although the plan is still in the "draft" phase in which changes can be made, he said initial responses from community groups have been positive.

If communities have concerns about noise, alignment of the roadway or other aspects, their input will be considered.

Doug Case, chairman of the Ahwatukee Village Planning Committee, said he will urge the group to participate.

"I'm not real keen on having staff-driven plans shoved down our throats," Case said. "But we as a group do recognize that this is a divisive issue in our community and we'll do our best to represent the diverse interests in the village."

Case said there is almost a 50-50 split between people who favor a "back door road into the community" and "people who don't want transient traffic in the village."

Phoenix planning staff held its first public review meeting with residents of Estrella Village in west Phoenix on Tuesday. Their Planning Committee voted, 7-0, to approve the plan concept proposed by the city.

On July 13, planning officials will meet with the South Mountain Village Planning Committee, followed by the Ahwatukee group.

Community meetings to receive public input will be held Aug. 30-31. The Phoenix City Council is scheduled to hold a hearing on the proposal Oct. 20.

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