

Loop 202 extension key issue at debate

By Cathryn Creno

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The economy, city services and public safety were topics of debate among four candidates competing to represent Ahwatukee as well as other parts of Phoenix the Sept. 1 City Council election.

But the extension of Loop 202 from Chandler to west Phoenix was clearly the key Ahwatukee issue Wednesday night at a debate hosted by the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce.

In the race, Ahwatukee residents Dana Marie Kennedy and Nathan Oshop and Chandler resident Barry Pacey are competing against incumbent Sal DiCiccio, Phoenix's District 6 seat.

DiCiccio, also an Ahwatukee resident, has been in the office since February, when he was appointed to the post by the city Council.

None of the candidates said they favor building a freeway through Ahwatukee. Proposed plans for the South Mountain freeway extension also call for cutting through part of South Mountain so the freeway can connect the East Valley to west Phoenix.

But each would approach the issue in a different way.

DiCiccio, 51 and president of a real estate development company, has said previously that a decision on Loop 202 must be made by the end of this year because residential and other property owners along the route are in limbo and cannot sell their property.



Sal DiCiccio

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Sal DiCiccio
District 6 City Council candidate

He said he has informally discussed possible alternative routes with Gila River Indian Community representatives and has met with federal, state and county officials about the current proposal.

“I have already called together our congressmen, state and county officials and told them it’s a non-starter,” he said.

Pacey, 52 and the owner of a general contracting firm, said his strategy would

be to delay the project as long as possible while working to encourage construction of the freeway south of Ahwatukee on the Gila River Reservation.

“My preference is let’s not rush into it,” he said. “Let’s get it right. If it’s another 25 years, what’s the problem?”

He also said he would like to see the East Valley and west Phoenix connected along Arizona 85, south of Ahwatukee.

Kennedy and Oshop had less concrete ideas, but said they would support the community in any opposition to freeway plans.

“I will not support a 202 freeway that blasts a hole through South Mountain,” said Kennedy, 41 and executive director of a non-profit to encourage women to

run for public office, Emerge Arizona, and communications director for the Arizona AFL-CIO. “I would fight it tooth and nail.”

Oshop, 30 and a Circle K clerk, said his goal would be to bring about community consensus on whether the freeway extension should go through Ahwatukee and “finding peace with the 202 situation.”

Throughout the evening, which drew a crowd of about 100 to the Ahwatukee Country Club, DiCiccio emphasized his accomplishments during his time in office, while the others criticized Phoenix for its economic problems and recent cuts to city services.

“We have a crisis in leadership,” Oshop

said. "The incumbents lack vision."

Oshop said he has plans to boost tourism to Phoenix and also to encourage business partnerships with companies in South American countries such as Brazil.

"Let's give people a reason to come to Phoenix other than to get to Scottsdale, the Grand Canyon or Sedona," he said. "We need to get money back to Phoenix. We need to create jobs."

Kennedy, who has a background as a social worker, said she would work to streamline red tape for businesses that need city permits, encourage volunteerism at community centers and other programs that have experienced cuts and focus on bringing high-paying "green" jobs to Phoenix.

DiCiccio emphasized a "bottom-up" focus, saying he would "always be on the neighborhoods' side" in fights against possibly disruptive business development. He also outlined a program that would allow police officers "more boot time" on the streets and less booking suspects into jail.

DiCiccio, meanwhile, discussed his efforts that have resulted in a partnership between Phoenix and the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce to help new businesses get through the permitting process faster.

He also cited a plan to have a private organization reopen and serve meals at the shuttered kitchen at Pecos Community Center, and a program in which volunteers from the American Legion and other community groups will develop trails on new undeveloped parkland in west Ahwatukee.

The four candidates also discussed the need to encourage Phoenix residents to shop in Phoenix to boost city sales-tax revenues.

Oshop proposed that Ahwatukee should have a community festival "at least once a month."

"Street festivals would be amazing for Ahwatukee," he said. "Let's draw people from Scottsdale here instead of us going there."