

City apologizes to Gila River Community over parkway plan

By Betty Beard

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The Phoenix city manager apologized Monday to the Gila River Indian Community's governor for the city's failure to notify the community before circulating a plan to put a stretch of the proposed South Mountain Parkway on the reservation.

Gov. Mary Thomas, the community's leader, complained in a letter to Mayor Skip Rimsza that the community was caught off guard two weeks ago when city planners began distributing preliminary plans for the 22-mile parkway.

"We were taken aback that this came out in this fashion and that we were not notified," Thomas said Monday.

City planners apparently caught a number of people by surprise by circulating the plans for a parkway to link west Phoenix to Ahwatukee Foothills.

Those surprised included Ahwatukee Foothills residents and the Phoenix mayor and city manager.

"I did not know and I know the mayor didn't know that the planning department was working on this draft plan. I got it the same time it went public," City Manager Frank Fairbanks said.

Phoenix Councilman Sal DiCiccio, who represents Ahwatukee Foothills, was incensed.

"You don't draft a plan and then say 'OK, here's our plan and what do you think of it?' Discussions should occur before the planning occurs," he said.

However, Phoenix planning director Dave Richert said many apparently forgot that the parkway has been planned for four years.

Most of the parkway would be on Phoenix land except for about a mile that planners penciled in on the Gila River Indian Community to avoid the expense and environmental damage of cutting into

South Mountain.

Fairbanks said the proposal had so many details that it led people to believe it's the only route being proposed. Richert, however, said that was never the intention and that the proposal was always meant to be a "work in progress document."

The roadway would give Ahwatukee Foothills its first exit to the west and would give west Phoenix residents a quicker route to Tucson.

The plan has already been approved by three west-side village planning committees and was scheduled to go before the Ah-

watukee Foothills committee for its recommendation next Monday.

Phoenix planners also scheduled public hearings Aug. 30 and 31 and planned to take the proposal to the Planning and Zoning Commission Sept. 22 and the City Council on Oct. 20.

If approved, city and state officials would have to find funding and negotiate with the Gila River community for a right-of-way.

But Fairbanks wants to start the planning all over. He wants the city to consult with Ahwatukee Foothills and Gila River residents as well as to consider the idea of

not building a road at all.

Thomas said the Pima and Maricopa Native American community does not want South Mountain cut either.

"There's a religious significance to that mountain," she said.

She said the community doesn't see any obvious benefits to having the road on its land, but said the community is open for discussion in the future. "We need to discuss it formally and then take it to the council."

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