

City Pulls Pecos Plan After Complaints

By Doug Murphy
Staff Writer

"It's a plan that the city of Phoenix is stuffing down our throats," was how councilman Sal DiCiccio described a proposal to extend Pecos Parkway to the west, around South Mountain Park to I-10.

But not anymore.

The proposed plan was dropped two weeks after copies were distributed to the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee on July 6, the same day that public hearings and reviews were held in the western part of Phoenix on the proposed parkway extension.

With the plan on an apparent fast track, local village planning committee members were shocked, because they had not been consulted and had hoped to conduct a community survey to gauge local support for opening Ahwatukee Foothills to the west and ending Ahwatukee Foothills unofficial title as the world's largest cul-de-sac.

On Monday, the city announced that it would pull the plan, pending community input.

"I think the plan was released by the planning department prematurely," said city manager Frank Fairbanks Monday afternoon. "We should have had more discussions with the Gila River Indian Community and Ahwatukee Foothills before it went out."

The Gila River Indian Community opposes the plan that projects Pecos Parkway to go either through a mountain on the southern edge of South Mountain Park that the Gila's consider sacred, or dropping down onto the flat lands of the Gila River Indian Community itself. More importantly, they objected to being kept in the dark on the preplanning.

"We remain very concerned that your office did not communicate its intent to circulate a plan of this nature, prior to distribution, given the key role the Community would have in the proposed project," wrote Gila River Indian Community Governor Mary V. Thomas in a scathing letter to Mayor Skip Rimsza last week.

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Copies of internal city e-mails confirm that the Gila River Indian Community was in the dark during the planning phase of the road extension.

"At this time the Planning Department has had very little contact with them, it was only yesterday (June 30) that the Gila River Indian Community received a draft copy of our Mitigation Plan," wrote Phoenix freeway mitigation planner Charla McCoy sent to city staffers asking if they had any contact with the Gila River Indian Community over the proposal to use their land as an option for the alignment of Pecos Parkway.

"Everyone was out of the loop," said DiCiccio on Saturday.

Fairbanks concurred, saying Monday that "It just moved too quickly and we have to listen

more. We need to gather some more input before we put a plan out."

The people who would be affected in Ahwatukee Foothills weren't contacted before the plan was drafted and the people on who's land the roadway might go weren't asked about it beforehand either, complained DiCiccio, who like Fairbanks, didn't see the plan until it was released by the planning department.

According to city planning director Dave Richert, the draft plan was simply that, "a working document," open for input from citizens and not set in stone. It is city policy to extend the roadway, said Richert, and the city planning staff wants to make sure that the road stays a parkway with as many amenities as possible, and does not turn into a freeway.

In February, during his state of the city address, Rimsza announced that he wanted to see Pecos Parkway completed to the west, "providing a quick, inexpensive way around South Mountain and giving our customers in Ahwatukee Foothills another way in and another way out." At that time DiCiccio said that it was important to "see what the community pulse is," regarding the merits of going west.

Fairbanks said that the plan would be pulled on Monday, at the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee meeting, after people have an opportunity to make their comments.

"We need to gather some more input before we put a plan out," said Fairbanks.

"Nothing is set in stone," reiterated Richert. "No one wants any back lash from what actually gets constructed in the future. If there other alternatives that work, we will pursue them."

New community meetings will be scheduled to gather input before another plan is drafted, followed by additional public hearings.

The planning committee meets at 6 p.m. at the Ahwatukee Foothills Senior center located at 5051 East Elliot.