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 News
 Phoenix, AZ

Indians Not Consulted on Pecos Extension, Either

By Doug Murphy
Staff Writer

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

Now the Gila River Indian Community has waded in with its own opposition to the plan, especially about being kept in the dark on the planning.

The proposal was dropped in the lap of the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee on July 6, the same day that public hearing began.

Local village planning committee members were shocked, because they 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-d-sac.

Wrote Gila River Indian Community Governor Mary V. Thomas in a scathing letter to Phoenix Mayor Skip Rimsza last week, "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." The city's plan projects that Pecos Parkway will either go through a mountain on the southern edge of South Mountain Park that the Gilas consider sacred, or will drop down onto the flat lands of the Gila River Indian Community itself.

Messages left by the *Ahwatukee Foothills News* with the Gila River Indian Community had not been returned by press time.

But copies of internal city e-mails confirm that the Gila River Indian Community was not involved 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 to city staffers, asking if they had had any contact with the Indians over the proposal to use reservation land as an option for the alignment of Pecos Parkway.

"Everyone was out of the loop," said DiCiccio on Saturday. The people who would be affected in Ahwatukee Foothills weren't contacted before the plan was drafted, and the people on whose land the roadway might go weren't asked about it beforehand, either," said the councilman.

According to city planning director Dave Richert, the draft plan is 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 want 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.

Now the road extension appears to be a *fait accompli*.

The community will be able to comment on the plans to mitigate noise and to provide amenities like greenbelts and trails at Monday night's meeting of the local planning committee.

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

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