

THE ISSUE: THE PARADOX OF GROWTH

Fueling the future (just not next door)

EDITORIAL

Is the explosion of people in the Valley of the Sun the biggest problem we face?

For many, growth is an enormous issue. And never more so than when it affects us personally.

Oh, on the big screen of life, being the second-fastest-growing region in America has its upside. For one thing, it means we're thriving economically. Arizona's population is projected to increase by 83 percent by 2025, to more than 10 million people, mostly because those new arrivals see more opportunity here than they did ... wherever.

The problem is that while the thrill of making a new life in the desert may be fine for the other guy, that's not necessarily so for those already here.

A recent survey by Valley Forward, a public-interest organization, confirms what most anyone trapped in a freeway traffic jam already knew: We don't care much for growth when it disturbs our current quality of life.

The study, conducted by WestGroup Research, found that 72 percent of Valley residents view sprawl as either a big or moderate problem.

In fact, we don't much like efforts to ameliorate sprawl, either, according to the research. A still larger percentage of the 400 residents surveyed — 75 percent — said they would oppose high-density development such as apartment or condominium projects in their neighborhoods. Same for smaller lot sizes. Bad, bad, bad.

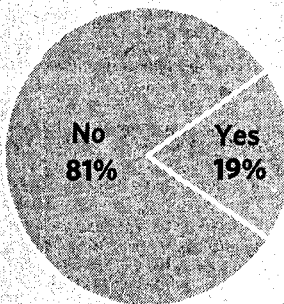
Many respondents also claimed they are shut out of the municipal planning process. Sixty-seven percent of those surveyed said they feel they have no voice in deciding what sort of development goes where.

The president of Valley Forward, Diane Brossart, concluded that communities need to do more outreach. That they need to do a better job of bringing residents into the planning process.

Well, maybe. But cities like Phoenix do not seem short of citizen planning commissions. And anyone who has ever shared a vast auditorium with a handful of other community activists greasing the nuts and bolts of a 10-year growth plan knows that it can be lonely work.

It is only when change happens — and it happens a lot in this fast-growing Valley — that most residents of a community become engaged. And, by and large, they arrive riled up over anything that threatens to change the way

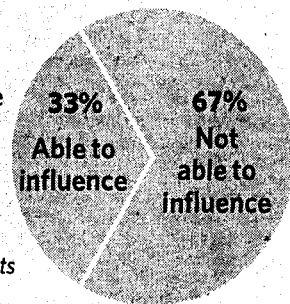
Perceptions of effective planning



"Do you think Valley communities have effective plans in place to handle continued rapid growth expected for Maricopa County?"

345 respondents

"Do you agree or disagree that you are able to influence the planning that happens in your community as it grows?"



390 respondents

Source: Survey conducted in April by WestGroup Research

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things are in their neighborhoods.

The enormous blast of fury from residents in the 24th Street and Camelback Road area over the proposed "Trump Tower" is a classic case in point. Change, even (or especially) in this rapidly growing urban region, is hugely unpopular with the people already here.

For advocates of citizen involvement in the planning process — and we certainly count ourselves among them — this creates a certain paradox.

Citizen involvement is more than just a good thing. It is a necessary thing.

But as the Valley Forward survey demonstrates clearly, the majority of citizens dislike change in their neighborhoods, whether citizen-planned or not. Small wonder that developers prefer setting down their bulldozer blades where few recalcitrant residents are around to resist.

On the macro scale, most of us agree that community and regional planning is good.

But no one lives a macro life. In the end, it's what we see outside our windows that counts most.

It's a paradox. A paradox of growth.