

Land use planning ideas not news to city, county

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Recommendations on land use planning that came out of the latest Arizona Town Hall weren't exactly news to city and county officials, who say they already have been following some of them.

That goes especially for recommendations like long-range planning and regional collaboration, said Greg Hyland, city of Yuma spokesman. He was a guest at the Yuma Rotary Club meeting Tuesday where a report on the town hall and its findings was presented.

"The majority of the recommendations looked good to me," he said. "They looked like issues the city and county are already working on."

That includes city and regional transportation planning through the Yuma Metropolitan Planning Organization, adoption in 1996 by the city and county of the joint land use plan, water agreements with irrigation districts and efforts to protect the area's military presence, Hyland said.

"We've been working on them for years. We're a little proactive here."

That hasn't been the case with much of the state. Land use planning has tended to deal with the next subdivision or the newest shopping center, project by project, said Tara Jackson, president of the Arizona Town Hall, who moderated Tuesday's presentation.

That approach will be inadequate as the state's population grows in the coming years, projected to more than double to 13 million or more people by 2050, concluded participants at the recent 91st Arizona Town Hall who struggled with the topic: "Land use: Challenges and choices for the 21st Century."

The big question was how to plan for that growth to balance development while not harming the very qualities - such as the state's natural, historic and cultural features - that are drawing people to Arizona, Jackson said.

Collaborative planning is crucial in managing infrastructure, transportation, education, environmental concerns, energy, water and natural resources, the report concluded.

A major challenge, Jackson said, is the management of millions of acres of state trust land and the rejection by voters of various ballot measures to reform restrictions on its sale and development.

Some trust lands have become barriers to urban growth, resulting in the leapfrog of development over it to private land beyond, she said. The restrictions also limit the value the trust has been able to receive from the land.

Jackson predicted that trust land reform will come up again this legislative session, with the hope of passing some small measure of reform.

This was her first town hall, said Krista Rodin, associate vice president and campus executive officer at Northern Arizona University-Yuma, and the topic of land use "was out of my realm. But I learned a lot."

She said the scary part is where all the people will live as Arizona's population grows.

"People will go where the transportation lines are," she said, as can be seen in central Arizona and the filling in of development between Phoenix and Tucson.

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While planning for internodal transportation is an important factor in land use planning, Rodin said, so too is education.

"When we talk about development, we can't forget about education. We need to incorporate it into planning ... how to sustain ourselves culturally and intellectually."

Yuma County Supervisor Lenore Stuart, who also attended the town hall, said she feels some frustration that "people build things, then want the city and county to provide services."

The key to managing growth, she said, is for all the agencies to work together and be sensitive to issues. "We're in the midst of so much change ... we need to be sensitive to how that impacts others."

Equally important, she said, is public participation in the planning process. "Citizens need to participate. They need to be aware of things and attend meetings and let us know what they want."