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# MEMORANDUM

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Date: January 5, 2004

To: The Honorable Chair and Members  
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry  
County Administrator 

Re: **Open Space Acquisition Accountability**

An issue associated with the open space acquisition bond question, in short, will be accountability. The public needs to know that the lands acquired for open space acquisition are acquired at the lowest possible cost and provide the greatest open space benefit to the public. Further, the lands must be accessible to the public or, in the case of where conservation easements or development rights are acquired, the lands need to be managed in accordance with the terms of either the conservation easement or development rights acquisition. Accountability will be a very important issue with the voters since the money necessary to retire the issuance of bonds to purchase open space conservation easements or development rights is paid by them annually through their secondary property tax. They deserve the highest standards of accountability and assurances that their money is being well-spent.

The Board took accountability to a new standard in the 1997 authorization by adopting bond implementation ordinances prior to a public vote on the bond issue. In the 1986 bond authorization, a simple resolution was all that was passed by the Board regarding commitment as to how bonds were to be spent. The resolution of 1986 covered just a few pages. The bond ordinance in 1997 covered over 100 pages and is continually being monitored and updated as implementation of the 1997 bond program nears completion. In 1997, two bond issues were authorized, one being a general obligation bond issue and sewer revenue bond issue authorized in May of 1997, and the other being a highway user revenue bond issue authorized in November of 1997. The May bond issue is nearing completion generally three years ahead of schedule, and the November 1997 highway user revenue bond issue, which got off to a rocky start, is now generally back on track.

Given the efforts of the Conservation Bond Advisory Committee to develop a program to acquire very important community open spaces, as well as lands thought to be highly important from a biological perspective, as well as advance the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, it is important to craft a system of accountability that, once put in place, remains in place throughout the duration of bond expenditures for open space, and continues after the open spaces have been acquired to assure the performance envisioned.

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**A Conservation Advisory Commission**

In order to ensure the highest accountability to the voters for any open space bond acquisition or conservation easement or development right acquisition authorized by the voters, I am recommending the Board form a nine member conservation advisory commission. The length of the term of appointment would be five years. One member would be appointed by each member of the Board of Supervisors, two members would be appointed by land conservation organizations active within Pima County such as the Nature Conservancy and the Arizona Open Land Trust, one member would represent the Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Commission, and another member would represent the local Board of Realtors. The purpose of the commission would be to provide oversight and monitoring of all open space acquisitions that would be placed before the Board for consideration. The commission would also review any land acquisitions made with other revenue sources that are open space related or conserve habitat such as those floodprone lands purchased through the Floodprone Land Acquisition Program. The commission would be free to make recommendations to the Board regarding any aspect of open space land acquisition, as well as the management of lands acquired through the program for the benefit of the public.

By establishing a formal conservation advisory commission, the Board will have established transparency and accountability in all open space land acquisitions authorized by bonds or through continuing program funding within the County. This is an important positive step in continuing accountability for the expenditure of public bond money.

The commission is also to be provided a budget sufficient to carry out this work and to fund an annual, independent audit of all financial transactions and records of the commission which will be made public.

**County Code to be Amended**

If the Board agrees, I believe it would be appropriate to amend the County Code to include the description, duties and selection process for the conservation advisory commission. The Board may wish to direct appropriate Code amendments at the January 20, 2004 Board meeting when the potential May 18, 2004 bond issue will be discussed.

CHH/jj

c: Chair and Members, Pima County Bond Advisory Committee  
Members, Conservation Bond Advisory Committee  
Jim Barry, Executive Assistant to the County Administrator