

Highway 85 corridor revitalization project seeking community vision for future

Pima County's Brownfields grant program proposal dealing with revitalization of commercial properties along Highway 85 in Ajo, Why, and Lukeville was discussed at the meeting of the Western Pima County Community Council. This was the second public meeting scheduled by Pima County to gather input for its application to the Environmental Protection Agency for \$400,000 in grant funding.

Daniel Tylutki, senior planner with the Pima County Community Development & Neighborhood Conservation Department, gave a ~~PowerPoint~~ presentation that provided clarification on how the county's Brownfields program works. The presentation also illustrated how the program is working so far in the unincorporated community of Flowing Wells, and it discussed how the county would like to replicate that successful model along the Highway 85 corridor in Ajo, Why, and Lukeville. Tod Whitwer, the environmental consultant contracted by Pima County for the program, was also on hand to field questions.

Tylutki defined Brownfields as abandoned properties that typically include gas stations, junkyards, and dry cleaners. He noted that these properties are often hard to redevelop because of potential ground contamination. The program's focus is to conduct environmental site assessments for ground contamination at no cost to the current landowner in hopes of encouraging transfer of ownership of the property to a public or private entity for redevelopment into other businesses or shops, thus promoting economic development. Tylutki emphasized that participation in the program is voluntary and that, if awarded the grants, the county and its proposed partners – the International Sonoran Desert Alliance and Why Ajo Lukeville Development – would hold additional public meetings to explain the benefits of the program.

The program promotes sustainable development and environmental enhancement, noted Tylutki. The creation of new jobs is one of the goals. A benefit of the program is that the environ-

age economic revitalization along the Highway 85 corridor. It will also utilize existing road and street beautification infrastructure instead of contributing to new urban sprawl outside a community.

Public perception of the program can be one of the obstacles to overcome, according to Tylutki. "People can freak out when they hear the word 'contamination'," he said, which may result in property owners shying away from taking advantage of the program. Whitwer explained that a leaky storage tank or contamination involving imminent danger to groundwater or neighbors must be reported to authorities, but other more minor contamination will not necessarily need to be reported. Identifying any contamination, however, is important in a property's redevelopment, he said.

"Using Flowing Wells as an example, it usually takes just one property owner to stick their neck out," said Tylutki. "That opens the floodgates and everyone else wants in also." He noted that the county will work with communities to develop a property database to establish priorities for assessment. He also pointed out that property owners who are considering selling old properties eventually need to obtain an assessment, so it is in their best interest to take advantage of the no-cost offer of the program.

With community support, two types of federal Brownfields grants will be applied for: petroleum assessment and hazardous waste assessment. The latter includes items such as dry cleaner solvent and other industrial chemicals. Each will be allotted \$200,000 to cover the cost of phase one and phase two assessments. Phase one assessments deal with paperwork surveys and interviews of current and prior property owners and cost between \$2,500 and \$5,000, while phase two assessments involve digging and sampling and cost from \$5,000 to \$50,000.

"We are looking for your vision for the Highway 85 corridor," said Tylutki. "Do you see it predominantly as small mom & non businesses as an area for

larger chain stores?" He added that public comment and participation is essential to the success of the redevelopment opportunity and that community visions and identified needs will be incorporated into the grant application.

A survey form was handed out to the nearly fifty people attending the meeting. Comments may also be made on the website www.pima.gov/ced/CDNC/Brownfield.htm online.

WPCCC agreed to write a letter of support for the corridor revitalization program.



Daniel Tylutki, standing near door, talked about a revitalization program for the Ajo, Why, Lukeville corridor during the meeting of the Western Pima County Community Council. Todd Whitwer, an environmental consultant on contract with Pima County, is standing at far right.