Public Oversight of Bond Programs
When Voters put their support behind something, particularly something that is going to cost them money, there needs to be assurances that they will get what they vote for. Accountability and transparency are two ideals that Pima County takes very seriously. When it comes to bond elections, we hold ourselves to a higher standard than almost all other governmental agencies. The level of detail provided to voters prior to our bond elections is second to none in Arizona. And after voters support our bond programs at elections, we continue that commitment through detailed semi-annual reports on how those bond programs are being carried out. These reports are provided to our oversight committees, our Board of Supervisors, and the public. Any change to our bond programs must be voted on by the Board of Supervisors at a public hearing noticed in the newspaper, and only after review and approval by the Bond Advisory Committee and any other applicable oversight committees. Our internal requirements for accountability and transparency have grown stronger over time.
Public Oversight of Bond Programs

Truth in Bonding Code

Prior to the May 20, 1997 bond election, the Board of Supervisors created a new section in the County Code, “Chapter 3.06, Bonding Disclosure, Accountability and Implementation.” This section of the code became known as the Truth in Bonding Code. The Truth in Bonding Code dictates the level of detail that must be provided to the public prior to early voting, as well as the timing and forms of distribution. Additionally, the code calls for the establishment of two formal oversight committees, the County Bond Advisory Committee and the Conservation Acquisition Commission. The code also states specifically the steps necessary to make changes to a bond project, and the level of detail to be provided in semi-annual reviews of existing bond programs.

We are not aware of any other governing body in the State of Arizona that has voluntarily committed to such strict disclosure and accountability standards and procedures. In addition, prior to the May 18, 2004 bond election, the Board adopted numerous revisions to this portion of the code, strengthening even more our commitment to accountability and transparency.

Bond Implementation Plan Ordinance

Per the Truth in Bonding Code, a detailed implementation plan must be adopted by ordinance prior to early voting, at a public hearing of the Board of Supervisors, and after full publication in the newspaper and on the County’s website. The bond ordinance provides a level of detail that simply cannot be provided on an election ballot due to the limited ballot space. The bond ordinance for the May 20, 1997 bond election was 118 pages, and the May 18, 2004 ordinance was 114 pages. Both contained detailed information about each of the projects. In the case of the 1997 Open Space Bond Program and the 2004 Conservation Acquisition Program, additional direction was provided regarding how the programs would be administered and the process that would be used to pursue acquisitions of individual properties within the project areas. In the case of the 2004 ordinance, direction was also provided regarding the establishment of two oversight committees, the Conservation Acquisition Commission and the Davis-Monthan Open Space Advisory Committee, including their roles and responsibilities.

Substantial cost increases or decreases of projects or properties, compared to the cost estimates included in the bond ordinance, require a formal bond ordinance amendment, as do the addition of projects or properties not originally in the ordinance. In order to amend a bond ordinance, several steps must be met to provide the public with opportunities to comment, support, or oppose the proposed changes. In the case of the 1997 Open Space and the 2004 Conservation Acquisition Programs, this first requires a vote by the Conservation Acquisition Commission at a publicly noticed meeting. If recommended, the change is then considered by the County Bond Advisory Committee at a publicly noticed meeting. If recommended again, the change is then considered by the Board of Supervisors after a public hearing noticed in the newspaper. There have been several amendments to the 1997 Open Space and the 2004 Conservation Acquisition Programs that enabled the County to take advantage of opportunities to buy important properties from willing sellers meeting the intent of the programs, which could not have been foreseen at the time of preparing for the bond elections.

Oversight Committees

Conservation Acquisition Commission
(2004 to present)

The Conservation Acquisition Commission was established by the Board of Supervisors prior to the May 18, 2004 bond election, as part of strengthening the Truth in Bonding Code and the County’s overall commitment to accountability and transparency. The Commission’s core responsibility is to oversee the 2004 Conservation Acquisition Program, including setting priorities for which properties to target and reviewing the detailed staff reports and acquisition agreements for each property proposed for purchase. No property can be approved for purchase by the Board of Supervisors unless the Commission recommended it be purchased. The Commission is also tasked with making recommendations to the County Bond Advisory Committee on which properties should be included in a future bond election, and recommendations on the dollar amount to be allocated to this purpose. Appointments to the Commission are for a term of 8 years.

The Commission is made up of 11 members, appointed as follows:

- Five members, one appointed by each of the Board of Supervisors
- Two members appointed by land conservation organizations active in Pima County
- One member appointed from the Pima County Parks and Recreation Commission
- One member appointed by the local board of realtors
- One member appointed by the ranching community
- One member appointed by the County Administrator

A Conservation Acquisition Commission meeting. Photo by Mike Stofko.
The Commission met 53 times between June 2004 and August 2010, and will continue to meet as necessary. The professional and personal experiences that each of the members bring to this program is invaluable. We are forever grateful for the incredible amount of time and effort these individuals have contributed – both to ensure that the best places in Pima County are conserved, and to make certain that the interests of the public and those organizations that have particular interest in conservation, ranching, and real estate, are well represented. The names of each of the Commissioners are included on the back cover of this report.

Open Space Acquisition Review Committee (1997 to 2004)

The Open Space Acquisition Review Committee (referred to as OSARC), was formed by the Board of Supervisors after the May 20, 1997 bond election, to continue to refine the list of properties that were eligible to be purchased with the bond funds, and to generally oversee implementation of the program. Additional information on the process that OSARC undertook can be found in the section of this report dedicated to Land Conservation Programs and Property Highlights, the 1997 Open Space Bond Program.

The Committee was made up of 16 members, with one member representing each of the following groups:

- The Nature Conservancy – Arizona
- Trust for Public Land
- Friends of the Sonoran Desert
- Rincon/Sonoran Institute
- Pima Trails Association
- Friends of the Santa Cruz River
- Pima County Parklands Foundation
- Center for Wildlife Connections
- International Right-of-Way Association
- Buffers Committee
- Sierra Club – Rincon Chapter
- The Appraisal Institute
- Pima County Parks and Recreation Commission
- Pima County Assessor
- Audubon Society
- Green Valley Coordinating Council

The names of each of the Committee members are included on the back cover of this report.

Davis-Monthan Open Space Advisory Committee (2004 to present)

The Davis-Monthan Open Space Advisory Committee was established by the Board of Supervisors prior to the May 18, 2004 bond election, as part of the 2004 bond implementation plan ordinance to oversee the acquisition of properties to prevent urban encroachment in the approach/departure corridors southeast of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. The Committee’s core responsibilities are determining which eligible properties to target, reviewing staff’s recommendations to pursue the purchase of particular properties, and making recommendations to the Board on whether to purchase such properties. Additional information on the process that this Committee undertook can be found in the section of this report dedicated to Land Conservation Programs and Property Highlights, the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base Urban Encroachment Prevention Program.

The six-member Committee is made up of the following appointments:

- Base Commander or designee
- Representative from the Arizona Department of Commerce
- Representative of the DM-50
- Representative of the City of Tucson
- Representative of the Tucson Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce
- County Administrator or designee

Pima County Bond Advisory Committee (1997-present)

The Pima County Bond Advisory Committee was established by the Board of Supervisors prior to the May 20, 1997 bond election, as part of the Truth in Bonding Code. The Committee was tasked with making recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on which projects to include in the 1997 bond program, and at what total cost, and to oversee implementation of the program after it was approved by voters. Prior to the May 18, 2004 bond election, the Committee’s responsibilities were expanded to also include making recommendations for future bond elections, and overseeing the implementation of those bond programs. Appointments are for 6-year terms. The Committee holds public meetings semi-annually to review reports from staff on the implementation of the bond programs, and consider proposed amendments if necessary. The Committee or subcommittees have been meeting on an almost monthly basis since 2007, in preparation for a future bond election originally planned for May 2008. The bond election has been deferred numerous times due to the state of the economy.

The Committee is made up of 25 members, appointed as follows:

- 15 members, three appointed by each of the Board of Supervisors
- Five members, one appointed by each of the incorporated cities and towns
- Two members, one appointed by each of the Tribes
- Three members appointed by the County Administrator