Economic Development – Putting It All Together

Diversifying the city’s tax base. Bringing quality jobs to town so that people who live in Peoria can also work here. Helping to create a positive environment for businesses already located in Peoria, and for those considering a move to the city. If those three sound like a full-time job, that’s because they are. And that’s just two of the goals of the city’s new Office of Economic Development.

Created in July 2002, the new office represents a major step forward in the effort to implement Peoria’s economic development efforts. The Office of Economic Development is responsible for creating jobs and pursuing new commercial development as well as retention of the city’s existing businesses. Previously, economic development had been the role of the Peoria Economic Development Group – a non-profit agency funded by the city. Although this relationship had some successes, the fact that the organization was not within the city organization presented challenges in promoting progressive economic development in Peoria. Bringing that function “in-house” has improved communication and coordination between the Economic Development staff and other city departments, as well as the staff of the Economic Development staff.

“This is a critical time for Peoria,” said Meredith Flinn, Deputy City Manager for Development and Community Services. “We are making decisions now that will affect what kind of business and commercial development Peoria will see in the coming years.

At the center of many of those decisions is Steve Prokopek, Peoria’s new Economic Development Director, a Certified Economic Developer who came to steer Peoria’s economic development efforts after working in similar roles for the cities of Phoenix, Chandler, and Glendale. Although the office’s three members are small by comparison to others, the experience of Prokopek and his staff promises to have a big impact on Peoria.

“When you look at suburban communities like Peoria, you really have to take an aggressive approach to economic development,” said Prokopek. “We really want to create diversity among our business community, whether it is in north, central, or south Peoria. We want to provide good retail opportunities and good employment opportunities throughout the city – but those opportunities are pretty not going to approach us first. We have to go find them, and that’s what we’re going to do.”

At the same time the new office was created, the City Council also decided to create an Economic Development Advisory Board to help set goals and guide city efforts in this critical area. The board concept was brought over from the former Peoria Economic Development Group, and some of its nine members came with it. Among other roles, the board will act as a resource for developing and implementing economic development policies and projects, assist with marketing the city, and act as an advocate for the business community.

“The resources on the Economic Development Advisory Board are incredible – we are very fortunate to have people willing to give their time and talents to the city,” said Prokopek.

Working together, the Office of Economic Development and the Economic Development Advisory Board recently created the city’s first 12-month Strategic Business Plan for Economic Development.

The plan was approved by the City Council in February 2003. It details the objectives and strategies that will be used in the ongoing effort to grow and diversify the city’s economic base and to improve the quality of life, culture, and the business climate that residents and businesses in Peoria desire. Some of the objectives include: identifying and developing employment and economic centers; marketing Peoria to business developers, consultants, and end users; and making city development processes more efficient for the business community. Perhaps the most important objective is to generate revenue to the city based on diversified business and economic growth.

“Generating revenue is so important because it provides the resources that allow the city to provide services, not only to the businesses but to our citizens on the whole,” said Prokopek. “Businesses need government services – police, fire, building safety to name a few examples – just like anybody else. If we develop the business community as we would like to, the revenue those businesses generate not only pay for their own services, but help offset the costs of providing those services to everybody else.”

Attracting new businesses, keeping existing businesses in Peoria, and creating the right kind of environment for progressive economic growth are a few of the many challenges that the Office of Economic Development will be tackling each day. Though few in number, the office will be leaving some large footprints as it carries Peoria’s economic development vision into the future. For more information, contact the Office of Economic Development at 623-773-7739 or visit www.peoriaed.com

Rio Vista Park Under Construction

Rio Vista, Peoria’s first community park located on the northwest corner of Loop 101 and Thunderbird Road, will have something for everyone to enjoy. The 52-acre park was planned and designed by the community to create a fun, relaxing, and diverse destination with appeal for everyone.

What can you expect from your community park? For starters, a 3-acre urban lake will help give the impression of a desert oasis. Strollers, walkers, and joggers will enjoy the footpath around the lake, and play on the state-of-the-art park equipment such as swings and slides. More than just a recreational and visual amenity, the lake will also serve as the water source to irrigate the park.

The community park should be a place for playing and relaxing with an assortment of barbecue areas and ramadas. One ramada will be able to accommodate groups of up to 300 people, with a central barbecue pit surrounded by tables and shade. Another ten smaller ramadas for groups of up to 50 people will be spread throughout the park.

Thrill seekers and sports enthusiasts can test their skill in the lighted 28,000 square foot skate park designed for day and evening use. If your game is softball, baseball, or soccer – you’ll score on the lighted multipurpose playing fields. For the kings and queens of the beach, the park will feature three lighted sand volleyball courts (with built-in sprinklers to cool the sand during the summer months). For the kids, Rio Vista will have all sorts of playground features on which to climb, swing, and slide. On warm days, look to cool off in the large fountain and water spray area.

All of these amenities are part of the first phase of construction, which is underway and expected to be completed by early 2004.

For more information, contact the Community Services Department at 623-773-7137 or parksinfo@peoriaaz.com
November

- Approved a $230,000 contract to conduct a geophysical study of geology and groundwater resources in north Peoria.
- Awarded an $8.6 million contract for construction of phase one of Riva Vista Community Park, located north of Thunderbird Road, west of Loop 101. (See related story in this issue of FOCUS.)
- Adopted the Council 12-Month Policy Agenda, which represents the top City Council policy priorities for the next twelve months. Major priorities include: Economic Development; Financing Peoria Government; Growth and Development; Communities and Neighborhoods; Transportation; Downtown Redevelopment; Public Services and Amenities (Quality Of Life); and Water & Wastewater.
- Accepted a report from the City Manager on the completion of two new park and ride lots in Oldtown Peoria. The lots are located at 84th Avenue north of the Community Center and have a capacity of 76 vehicles, bike storage, transit stops and a bus bay. The $650,000 cost was fully funded through a State grant.
- Approved a $230,000 contract to conduct a geophysical study of groundwater resources in north Peoria.

December

- Authorized a development agreement with A2 Broadway Dinner Theater, to be located adjacent to the current Larry Miller Hyundai dealership.
- Established initial zoning for the Saddleback Heights development, a 6,000-acre 250-acre mountain preserve.
- Authorized a development agreement with AZ Broadway Dinner Theater, to be located at the southwest corner of 77th Avenue and Paradise Lane (east of the Peoria Sports Complex.)
- Adopted amendments to the Circulation Element of the Peoria General Plan including a future proposed connection to the Loop 101 at Beardsley Road and the future route of Loop 103 in northwest Peoria.
- Approved a $1,150,000 contract for the construction of 112th Avenue between Rose Garden Lane and Beardsley Road. This new two-lane road will eliminate truck traffic on Rose Garden Lane between 112th Avenue and 107th Avenue.
- Accepted a report from the City Manager on the completion of two new park and ride lots in Oldtown Peoria. The lots are located at 84th Avenue north of the Community Center and have a capacity of 76 vehicles, bicycle parking, transit stops and a bus bay. The $650,000 cost was fully funded through a State grant.
- Approved 6 new neighborhoods for residential traffic control measures under the Transportation Management Program. Since its inception in 2000, this program has helped 26 neighborhoods with traffic issues such as speeding and cut-through traffic. For more information on the program, call the Traffic Engineering Division at 623-773-7224.

February

- Approved an expanded recycling drop-off program that will increase the number of recyclable material accepted starting in the Summer of 2003. Recycling drop-off locations will accept newspaper, aluminum, cardboard, metal cans, certain kinds of plastic, telephone books and other kinds of paper. (Glass will not be accepted due to the likelihood of broken glass contaminating the other materials.)
- Approved a development agreement for Larry Miller Mazda, a new 17,000 square foot auto dealership, to be located adjacent to the current Larry Miller Hyundai dealership on Bell Road.
- Approved a development agreement with the Chili Davis Baseball Company for the development of a 30,000 square foot high-tech indoor baseball training facility located adjacent to the Peoria Sports Complex (west of 77th Avenue on Paradise Lane).

CITY COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

Mayor’s Report

The two most important functions of government are protection of the public safety and stewardship of the public treasury. In our extraordinary times, these both take on new meaning.

With the current terrorist threat, public safety increasingly means public health, especially with respect to clean water. In 2002, our city opened a new, state of the art water treatment plant. Other water sources, also, were expanded specifically to meet our growing needs. When tragedy struck our community in an area not served by city water, we were able to respond quickly to protect our citizens.

The more traditional public safety services of police and fire protection have gained more resources and personnel to meet our expanding city’s needs. A new public safety building is currently under construction. The crime rate and fire safety statistics for Peoria are the envy of the state.

In a city that is growing like Peoria, comparing budgets from one year to another does not necessarily give an accurate picture of governmental efficiency. One of the measures I use is the ratio of public employees to the population of the city. For several years, both this ratio and our tax rate have been on a downward trend line, while services have expanded. Additionally, we compare favorably with other cities in these areas. This means that the citizens of Peoria are getting good value for their tax dollars.

With our growth comes tremendous opportunity. The Challenger Center is becoming a major statewide and even national attraction. The Center recently became a focal point for the community to mourn the loss of the Columbia 7 crew and to honor their noble pursuit and commitment to greater discoveries. A new community theater and a dinner theater are currently under design. A destination resort has begun development and will be announced in the near future. Quinterra golf course has been named one of the top 100 courses in the country, and they will begin construction on their second course shortly. Recent and projected developments in our commercial and industrial cores mean new businesses, more jobs, and greater economic vitality for Peoria.

As the state and national economies remain sluggish, many cities around the Valley are announcing major cuts in personnel and services in the coming year. Fortunately, Peoria is not in that predicament. We do not budget money until after it is realized, therefore we do not have to implement cuts when the economy slows down. This is something like the old adage of ‘do not count your chickens until they are hatched’. There is persistent talk of the legislature trying to balance the state budget post veto override from the citizens. If this happens, Peoria city services will suffer, but for now, our community is in very good financial shape.

Mayor John C. Keegan

Peoria’s Government Channel 11 is available to Cox and Qwest cable television customers and features a variety of government and general interest programming. City Council meetings are televised live and rebroadcast each night through the following Sunday.
Planners Shaping New and Old

City planners are engaged in a variety of different projects that will shape the city’s growth and development in both the immediate and distant future. These plans are diverse and complex as the varied geographic environments found in the different areas of Peoria, but they are all focused on maintaining and improving Peoria’s quality of life.

The City Council adopted the Desert Sands Conservation Master Plan in 1989. This plan identifies undeveloped areas of Peoria that merit special consideration and discusses strategies that can be used to help preserve them. It examines the natural character of northern Peoria to remain beautiful while respecting the development rights of individual property owners.

The plan calls for creation of a Desert Sands Conservation ordinance, which is close to being completed and taken to the City Council for approval. This ordinance deals specifically with hillside development, protection of native plants, and building setbacks from washes and other natural features. It provides a more comprehensive perspective when looking at development – considering the overall impact (rather than a lot-by-lot review) and seeking to provide the greatest amount of beneficial conservation for both the public and the environment.

From the new horizon to Peoria’s roots – while working on the best ways to preserve areas as yet untouched, city planners are also creating some detailed plans to help bring the previously adopted Central Peoria Revitalization Master Plan to life. One of the things happening under the Plan is the preparation of site plan concepts for Oldtown, city planners are shaping what Peoria will be in the years to come. The results of some of these efforts will be seen over the course of many years, some will be seen very soon.

For more information, contact the Planning Division at 623-773-7200 or planning@peoriaaz.com

Very few parents would hand the keys to the family car to their 13-year-old, or let them ride a motorcycle on busy city streets. Motorized scooters (sometimes called “go-peds”), however, are becoming more and more common for kids of all ages, and many parents do not realize that these scooters often place both children and motorists at risk. In the winter of 2001, concern for safety persuaded the Peoria City Council to adopt an ordinance that regulates these and other motorized play vehicles.

In order to make sure people have a clear understanding of these rules, the Peoria Police Department has started to enforce the motorized scooter ordinance more aggressively and will write citations to those in violation of the law.

These motorized scooters are fast, tricky to maneuver and difficult to see – a combination that makes the potential for accidents and injuries high,” said Peoria Police Chief David Leonardo. “Our officers are going to help make sure that everyone riding these vehicles understands the rules for their own safety, but parents need to do their part!”

The most obvious (and most often overlooked) rule is that these motorized scooters, just like bicycles and cars, must be operated in accordance with the rules of the road. All traffic signals and signs must be obeyed, and traffic rules must be understood by those operating the scooters.

Some rules for motorized play vehicles (MPV’s) under City Ordinance 01-172 include:

- MPV’s are not to be operated between sunset and 8 a.m.
- Anyone under the age of 18 must wear a helmet when operating a MPV.
- MPV’s must be equipped with a white light visible from the front and sides to 300 ft., a white or yellow reflector on each side visible to 200 ft., and a red reflector visible from the rear to 500 ft.
- MPV’s must be equipped with an operable brake that enables the operator to make a brake wheel skid on dry, level, clean pavement.
- MPV’s must be equipped with a muffler designed to reduce engine noise.
- MPV’s cannot be equipped with high performance exhaust, filter, or carburetor kits designed to increase maximum speed.
- Passengers may not be carried on MPV’s.
- MPV’s cannot be operated on sidewalks, or on city streets that have four or more lanes or a posted speed limit greater than 30 miles per hour.
- Parents or guardians cannot authorize or permit minors to violate state law or city codes regarding MPV’s.

Individuals with questions about the rules for operating MPV’s should contact the Peoria Police Department at 623-773-8311 or e-mail policedep@peoriaaz.com

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General Plan Amended to Add Beardsley Connection to Loop 101

In the Fall of 2001, the City of Peoria initiated a major traffic study in north central Peoria, looking at the area from Bell Road to Happy Valley Road, 91st Avenue to 67th Avenue. The study, known as the North Central Peoria Traffic Circulation Study, looked beyond Peoria’s borders into the City of Glendale and portions of unincorporated Maricopa County to develop short and long-term solutions in this fast developing area.

The findings from the study were presented to the City Council in 2002. While some of the study’s recommendations regarding streets in Glendale are still under review by the City of Glendale, the Peoria City Council has accepted the study and how it applies to Peoria, and city staff is moving forward with projects recommended in the study.

Confirmed in the study was the need for another access point off Loop 101. The recommended solution is to extend Beardsley Road and create new frontages in order to ease traffic congestion at the intersections of 83rd Avenue & Union Hills Drive and at 75th Avenue & Deer Valley Road. This concept involves extending Beardsley Road east across New River to reach the existing Loop 101 southbound on-ramp. For vehicles heading north/east on Loop 101, a new bridge will be built adjacent to the existing Loop 101 overpass at Union Hills. Traffic will move south along the frontage road, cross the new bridge, and then merge with traffic on the existing northbound on-ramp from Union Hills Drive.

Another new frontage road will link the existing off-ramp at 75th Avenue to the Beardsley Road extension, allowing westbound traffic to exit Loop 101, cross 75th Avenue and travel west onto Beardsley Road. This will eliminate the need to travel on 75th Avenue north to Deer Valley Road in order to gain access to destinations in northwest Peoria.

This concept has moved into the next phase, a cost-benefit analysis that will identify remaining design issues and estimate the costs involved in completing these extensive improvements. Provided the plan is financially feasible, the city will then work to identify funds for construction and move forward with designing the project. The City of Glendale will also have to approve the project because some of the improvements are in Glendale. While the city understands the pressing need for traffic relief in this area, the complexity and cost of the proposed Beardsley Road extension suggests a realistic timeframe for completion at three to five years.

For more information, contact the Engineering Department at 623-773-7212

Preliminary Concept for Beardsley Road Extension and Loop 101 Access

Preliminary Concept for Beardsley Road Extension and Loop 101 Access

1. Traffic heading for Loop 101 may travel on Beardsley Road, west to north, after crossing 83rd Avenue, become a frontage road.
2. The frontage road will then merge with the existing Union Hills off ramp to the existing Loop 101 ramp from 75th Avenue, which contains the southbound Loop 101 ramp from 83rd Avenue.
3. Traffic heading north on Loop 101 will cross Union Hills and use the existing Loop 101 north on ramp.
4. Traffic heading north on Loop 101 will cross Union Hills and use the existing Loop 101 north on ramp.
5. Traffic heading east on Loop 101 will cross Union Hills and use the existing Loop 101 south on ramp.
6. Traffic heading south on Loop 101 will cross Union Hills and use the existing Loop 101 north on ramp.
7. Traffic heading north on Loop 101 will cross Union Hills and use the existing Loop 101 south on ramp.
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10. Traffic heading south on Loop 101 will cross Union Hills and use the existing Loop 101 north on ramp.
11. Traffic heading north on Loop 101 will cross Union Hills and use the existing Loop 101 south on ramp.
12. Traffic heading south on Loop 101 will cross Union Hills and use the existing Loop 101 north on ramp.
13. Traffic heading north on Loop 101 will cross Union Hills and use the existing Loop 101 south on ramp.
Lake Pleasant Parkway
Phase 2 of the Lake Pleasant Parkway (which will continue the parkway from 95th Avenue west to Williams Road) has been designed. Right-of-way acquisition is in progress and the construction is expected to begin in Fall 2003.

Union Hills Reconstruction
The reconstruction of Union Hills Drive from 84th Avenue to the west city limit (approximately 92nd Avenue), including rubber asphalt overlay, is in the contract bid and award phase. Construction is expected to begin in June/July 2003.

Deer Valley Road Bridge
A joint project between Maricopa County, the City of Peoria, and the City of Glendale to build a bridge on Deer Valley Road over New River (just west of 75th Avenue) is nearing completion. For information, contact the project hotline at 480-350-9288 or check the Maricopa County Department of Transportation web site at: http://www.rightroads.org/news.htm

Olive Ave. Overpass at 75th Ave. & Grand Ave.
An Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) Project that will elevate Grand Avenue over the intersection of 75th Avenue and Olive Avenue is expected to begin construction this summer.

For more information on these or other road construction projects in Peoria, contact the Public Works Department at 623-773-7210.

City of Peoria Telephone Numbers

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ALL NUMBERS ARE IN THE 623 AREA CODE

Register for Sports Leagues and Recreation Programs 24-hours a day

The City of Peoria Community Services Department offers many youth and adult sports leagues and recreation programs and classes for all ages, and signing up just got easier.

Log on to: http://recreation.peoriaaz.com to check out what is offered and to register for City of Peoria sports, recreation, and before and after school programs and classes.