

Sahuarita Town Center Can Be A Win/Win Partnership

“There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.” The Inscription from Machiavelli’s Tomb.

SAHUARITA, AZ (Oct. 1, 2008) – A distinctive place to live and a convenient lifestyle are essential elements of a livable community. In addition to providing unique homes, the vision of Rancho Sahuarita and the Town of Sahuarita includes schools, recreation, and now, a traditional “Town Center”, which will serve as a social gathering place for friends and neighbors to live, learn, work, play and shop.

To implement its master plan, Rancho Sahuarita has already donated over 60 acres for school sites, a 15-acre lake park and an additional six acres for a municipal complex. Rancho Sahuarita is also working with the Sahuarita Town Council to preserve the Santa Cruz River in its natural state by enhancing this river corridor with a pedestrian friendly linear park. It recently agreed to donate about 32 acres of riverbank and open space to accommodate a sports-oriented North Park with baseball and soccer fields, a skate park, and basins that the Town is currently building as part of one of many public/private partnerships with Rancho Sahuarita.

The Rancho Sahuarita plan has always envisioned a pedestrian-friendly Town Center that features an old-fashioned Main Street, Central Park, a municipal complex, a Post Office, retail shops and residential uses. A Sahuarita Town Center, located south of Sahuarita Rd. and on both sides of I-19, could incorporate an urban, mixed-use design, architecturally inspired by the traditional downtowns found in many small communities. Rancho Sahuarita’s goal is to create a definitive sense of place that provides an identity for the community and a focal point for the entire town. The outline for achieving this vision has been presented to residents of Quail Creek, and Rancho Sahuarita, and throughout the town; residents have expressed their support for this proposal to develop a Sahuarita Town Center.

To establish an even more vibrant place, Rancho Sahuarita has offered to donate a Public Library site, located on the planned Main Street. This exceptional parcel would front the Central Park that will include interactive “kids” play areas, a grass amphitheatre, gardens, a river walk, picnic areas, and other amenities. The Town’s new Central Park would provide a special venue where neighbors can meet for concerts, festivals, and holiday celebrations.

The Sahuarita Town Center will feature architecturally distinctive buildings, which create a one-of-a-kind destination, and showcase Rancho Sahuarita’s unique 17th century Spanish Colonial architecture. Just east of the existing Post Office, the Town has completed a 62,000 square foot municipal complex, and Carondelet is planning a medical campus. Along with the proposed Main Street, Central Park and Library, these facilities would make “Downtown Sahuarita” one of the most exciting amenities in Southern Arizona.

There is general agreement that the future vision for the Town of Sahuarita should include a Town Center, community and regional shopping, and jobs. As these common goals are achieved, an expanded sales tax base will generate additional revenue needed to support additional Town services. With the proper infrastructure in place, the time frame to meet these common goals can be decreased and recurring tax revenue can be increased. Without this investment in improvements, it is not likely that further commercial development will occur as quickly as residents, the Town and Rancho Sahuarita desire.

Individually, the Town, Rancho Sahuarita, nor future commercial users have the financial ability to fund all of the essential improvements. However, a public/private partnership could respond to this challenge by facilitating the construction of the improvements required to attract new commercial development to the Sahuarita area at a much earlier date that might otherwise happen. This development will create needed tax revenue that would not typically occur for many years, and which could be used to help offset the cost of the necessary infrastructure.

Based on legislative authority, communities throughout Arizona and the country have offered various strategies and reimbursements, including the sharing of future tax revenue, to support the development of essential infrastructure that will encourage commercial growth. Private companies provide financial and development resources to build crucial infrastructure and then are repaid from a portion of the future tax on rental and lodging income and retail sales. Developers front all of the money, time and effort to complete the improvements and the municipality receives the future benefits. In addition, the companies assume the risk that the anticipated commercial development will occur to provide the revenue to repay their costs.

A perfect example of the ongoing success this type of commercial development can bring to the Town is the Rancho Sahuarita Marketplace. This vibrant, open-air gathering place, anchored by a 108,000 square foot Fry's Marketplace and a Chase Bank with about 35,000 square feet of adjacent retail space, constitutes the first phase of development in the Rancho Sahuarita Marketplace and Village, and is providing the community with a one-stop shopping destination for pharmacy, grocery, banking, and a wealth of other convenient services. However, this type of development will not occur, south of Sahuarita Road, in the near future due to the substantial costs of providing off-site infrastructure to the Town Center area.

“Having all the conveniences of the Rancho Sahuarita Marketplace and Village so close by adds significantly to the quality of life of all of the Town's residents,” said Robert Sharpe, Managing Partner of Rancho Sahuarita, adding, “We are pleased to have been given the opportunity to provide this community a commercial amenity right in their backyard.”

In addition to providing improvements for the Library, Central Park, and Main Street, Rancho Sahuarita would advance substantial sums to construct the infrastructure necessary to attract new commercial development to the 356-acre Town Center. The

investment of these improvements would be offset by the Town reimbursing Rancho Sahuarita from 50% of the additional tax on rental and lodging income and retail sales proceeds generated by users located “in this new commercial district.” Once Rancho Sahuarita is paid back for its costs, the Town’s share of this tax revenue produced from this new development would increase from 50% to 100%.

This new public/private partnership between the Town of Sahuarita and Rancho Sahuarita, which would rapidly increase tax revenue, would help the Town to transition from an overdependence on cyclical “growth taxes” to a more stable, long term source of income. By better positioning the Town financially to withstand difficult economic times, this arrangement could eliminate the need for additional taxes on residents, while providing funds for future community improvements like the Library and Central Park. According to Sharpe, “An infrastructure reimbursement partnership would allow growth to pay for itself, the Town to achieve economic self-sufficiency, and residents to benefit by being closer to services.”

Over the years, Rancho Sahuarita and the Town have worked together to create a Town Center for Sahuarita, and now residents overwhelmingly support the vision of a Main Street lifestyle coupled with exciting commercial areas. Facilitating commercial development through a new public/private partnership creates a “win/win” opportunity to guarantee the Town’s future financial success. Sharpe recently said, “Creating a strong commercial base, as well as a popular destination for residents, are vital to the continued prosperity of the area. Rancho Sahuarita is committed to being an active partner in a civic vision that will accommodate the future needs of the community.”

According to Tom Murphy, the Community Liaison for Rancho Sahuarita, “It’s these types of public/private partnerships that can clearly enhance the quality of life for the Town’s residents. We will continue to work diligently to develop more relationships with stake holders that will assure the future success of the community and surrounding areas.”

About Rancho Sahuarita

Situated just south of Tucson, Rancho Sahuarita is southern Arizona’s best master-planned community. With a total of 573 new home sales during 2007, Rancho Sahuarita was the 11th fastest selling master planned community in the country, according to Robert Charles Lesser, the renowned, national consulting firm. It features a 15-acre lake park, miles of paved trails that weave throughout the community, neighborhood parks with pools, and Club Rancho Sahuarita, with the largest private water park in the metro area. Surrounded by the beauty of pristine desert, mountain ranges and pecan groves, Rancho Sahuarita offers many neighborhoods by a variety of quality builders, with single-family homes, priced from the 150s to the high 400s.