

FICO begins process that will transform Sahuarita, GV

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By Philip Franchine Green Valley News |

FICO on Friday officially launched the process of developing much of the world's largest pecan grove into a master-planned community.

In its 160-page Specific Plan filed with the town of Sahuarita, Farmers Investment Co. said over the next 50 years it expects to build roads, trails, parks and riverfront improvements on most of its 5,659 acres in the town as the orchards slowly give way to houses, businesses, roads and parks. The company plans to leave 2,100 acres of open space, some of which will remain pecan groves, with large orchards north of Sahuarita Road facing Rancho Sahuarita, and north of La Posada.

The centerpiece of the project is the Santa Cruz River. FICO owners Dick Walden and Nan Stockholm Walden hope that will become a regional attraction featuring a riverwalk and cafes and two-story structures that look out over the river. Part of that vision means FICO and public agencies will have to plan and pay for barriers that would reduce the size of the flood plain, which extends about a mile east to Nogales Highway.

The plan does not say who will pay for which improvements, but FICO says it expects to build all internal streets and roads and the plan says the company expects to either pay the town an impact (growth) fee or to build improvements such as roads and parks in lieu of an impact fee. The town currently uses a new construction sales tax to serve the same purpose as an impact fee — paying for public infrastructure such as arterial roads and parks needed to serve new residents.

The FICO plan calls for 19,000 new housing units, fewer than the 22,000 that town zoning would allow. By comparison, when it's built out, Rancho Sahuarita is projected to have 11,000 to 12,000 homes.

Much of the FICO land is in Sahuarita, where most development will occur, but 573 acres are in Green Valley, just north of La Posada, and almost half of that is in the flood plain and will remain pecan groves. A big chunk of the Green Valley land will remain low-density and likely will be developed as ranchettes.

FICO expects to submit a plan to Pima County by the end of April for the Green Valley section, which is 1.5 miles south of the Sahuarita section.

Gradual rollout

The development is not expected to occur any time soon, in part because the economy is down, the Waldens said Thursday.

Dick Walden said that before the economy fell in 2008, he was getting calls weekly from people seeking to acquire FICO land but he felt uncomfortable selling until he had a better idea of an overall plan for the area.

During this process, the Waldens sought community input through several public meetings.

The plan calls for El Toro Road to eventually be six lanes, with a parkway designation; and other six-lane roads (without the parkway designation) would be Sahuarita Road, Nogales Highway from Pima Mine Road south to El Toro Road; Pima Mine Road and Duval Mine Road.

Future four-lane roads include Old Nogales Highway, Santa Rita Road and a new road east of Nogales Highway from Old Nogales Highway north to Walden Grove High School, north of Sahuarita Road. Two sewer plants are planned near Pima Mine Road and the river and near the railroad spur southwest of Sahuarita Road and the current Nogales Highway alignment.

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More about Fico

- **ARTICLE:** Pecan harvest is under way



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