

# Sahuarita looks to future; shops could be coming

By Kitty Bottemiller

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Sahuarita of tomorrow — make that tomorrow's grandchildren — will likely be an extension of what Bob Sharpe started with his Rancho Sahuarita development years ago, with a few tweaks.

That's how it was described to Sahuarita's advisory Planning & Zoning Commission in an update meeting Monday, and how it's shaping up in the latest conceptual drawings of two working plans. One is the Sahuarita Farms master plan for the Santa Cruz River corridor; the other, Sahuarita East Conceptual Area Plan (SECAP), is laying groundwork the annexation of 30,000 acres east of town, to dovetail with the town's General Plan, which gets updated every 10 years.

The two are crucial, officials say, to achieve the vital, sustainable, inclusive and desirable community they envision, replete with residential, recreational, educational, shopping and employment opportunities to provide for a projected population of 90,000 and workforce of 50,000. Economic advantages are expected to abound in the trade corridor extending from Sonora to Tucson and including Sahuarita.

Both are far-reaching, stretching 40 to 50 years out but showing visible progress as soon as next year, following key approval by town officials and others as the various stages progress.

Residents may see work begin in 2015 on a new trailhead north of Sahuarita Road for hiking/equestrian use that may ultimately connect with the Continental Farms area in Green Valley, and a new trailhead connecting Abrego Drive to the fledgling Canoa Preserve Park.

That's just the beginning, and there will be much more discussion before, during and beyond to position the town for the working vision of the future.

The public can see details of the plan drafts at a series of upcoming Town Hall meetings, where land-use and architectural concepts, streetscapes and drainage cross-sections will be displayed (see box).

Sahuarita Farms Specific Plan, which now includes revisions requested by town officials from earlier drafts, will be presented at a hearing tentatively set for September before the Planning & Zoning Commission, followed by public hearings, probably in October.

Viewers can expect to see accommodations for schools, adjacent parks, traffic and transit flow, water use, sewer and more. While it addresses a multitude of considerations, Mark Reddie of LVA Urban Design, spokesman for the Sahuarita Farms plan on behalf of landowner Farmers Investment Company (FICO), cautions that it's all based on flexibility that allows for change as needed through the formal amendment process, as FICO's pecan orchards are retired

## WANT TO WEIGH IN?

**Go to [sahuaritaaz.gov](http://sahuaritaaz.gov)** to learn more and comment on Sahuarita's General Plan "Aspire 2035" so far.

Want an in-person presentation? Contact Sarah More, Town of Sahuarita's Planning & Building Director, at [smore@sahuaritaaz.gov](mailto:smore@sahuaritaaz.gov) or call 520-822-8853 to schedule a community or neighborhood visit where you can learn details, ask questions and express opinion to help shape the plan.

### Public meetings for SECAP review:

2 p.m. July 15

6 p.m. July 16

5 p.m. July 18

All convene at Town Hall, 375 W. Sahuarita Center Way.

**SECAP next steps:** public outreach/input sessions planned over the next two months, final public meetings in October, completion of the plan, November, and integration with the General Plan, by July 2015.

View the Sahuarita Farms Specific (Master) Plan at [www.sahuaritafarms.com](http://www.sahuaritafarms.com). To comment, contact Sarah More.

## DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

**A Circle K at Nogales Highway** and what may be the future Quail Crossing is the planned result of a lot split now in process, Sahuarita Planning & Building Director Sarah More said at a Planning & Zoning Commission meeting Monday.

**An undisclosed party** has expressed recurring interest in the former El Pollo Lucky restaurant site in Sahuarita Plaza. More said she could not divulge the party involved, however, they have returned to the town several times, asking specific questions about business and signage requirements.

**More also noted area home sales**, with Quail Creek developer Robson Properties recently reporting their best quarter since 2007. Except for the KB lots on the north side just purchased near Pima Mine Road, Rancho Sahuarita had no lots available. Now, three plats are currently in process, and ongoing, one-at-a-time plats in Quail Creek.

and replaced by development.

Based on 2 percent annual growth, development isn't likely to be too far off. That rate may vary, but "I can't predict anything different" now, said Town Planning & Zoning Director Sarah More.

SECAP's next steps call for public outreach/input sessions over the next two months, public meetings in October, draft completion in November, and tie-in with the town's General Plan, by July 2015.

Why such earnestness on the apparent emergence from economic recession?

Sahuarita has experienced "tremendous growth" — 600 percent — since 2000.

"It's best to preserve land now while it's in single ownership," Reddie said, calling this a rare opportunity to create a regional amenity without causing further damage from potential floods.

Already there are inklings of need for more schools, utilities, fire and police stations, libraries, voc-tech facilities and other infrastructure, creating frustration over development without a master plan.

So FICO decided to draft a "responsibly proactive" one, also addressing the largely undeveloped river through town which could wreak havoc on existing infrastructure in the event of a major storm — two of which have struck in the last 30 years — as well as the natural floodplain, Reddie said.

Ongoing headcutting and erosion of riverbanks have created unsafe conditions for the community, he noted. The preference is a wide, shallow plain such as that south of Continental Road in Green Valley, healthier for the community, wildlife and other nature.

SECAP's annexation — which anticipates most of the acreage between Houghton Road and Interstate 19, FICO lands on the west, and Santa Rita Experimental Range, south — is planned to stop encroachment from outside interests.

"The point is, we're doing this because we need our little imprint and situation set," said Town Council member Gil Lusk, part of the group drafting the plan.

"If we don't, Tucson and others will. I would rather take the ambience of Sahuarita east than that of Tucson."

The goal isn't to "wipe the slate clean" on that spread "but preserve what we've got and be ready for the future."

SECAP isn't even being referred to yet as a growth area but future boundaries, as growth for years yet will be limited to the Town Center along Sahuarita Road, and Duval Mine and Pima Mine roads.

Talks between the town and state, which now controls territory east, began in 2007. Not much will happen until annexation approvals are granted and parcelling begins nearest existing infrastructure — still years away, Lusk said.

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