

Utah Offers Sustainability Model

Betty Beard

It's time for the Valley to consider a massive and regional planning effort to ensure water supplies, reduce traffic congestion and just make it a better place to live in the future, a Utah attorney advised Southeast Valley business and government leaders Wednesday.

Utah launched such a project, called Envision Utah, in 1997 after realizing its rapid growth was going to leave it short of water, full of dirty air and with intolerable congestion, said Robert Grow, an attorney who helped lead the award-winning, decade-long project.

"You can either accommodate (the growth) and keep this as a great place to live, or you can stop the growth. To stop the growth, you (have) got to make it an undesirable place for everyone," he said at an East Valley Partnership forum on creating competitive and sustainable communities.

The Utah project was guided by a diverse committee of about 150 people, and an annual budget of more than \$1 million. After a long process that included surveys, 32 specific strategies were developed.

Envision Utah won top awards from the Urban Land Institute, Alliance for Regional Stewardship, American Planning Association and American Public Transportation Association. It also inspired similar plans in southern California, southern Louisiana, Dallas, Chicago and other areas.

Grow believes it made residents more aware of transit systems as a way to curb traffic congestion and air pollution. Last fall, residents in Utah approved speeding up construction of their transit programs by 15 years, he said.

He said Arizona has a good opportunity to plan cities that are self-sustaining, such as the 1,010-acre Superstition Vista site in Pinal County that could bring in a million residents and double the size of the Southeast Valley over the next decades.

Roc Arnett, president and CEO of the East Valley Partnership, said he invited Grow to speak to get Southeast Valley leaders thinking regionally and because "he (Grow) is one of the few people in the country that has got this notion of planning big and bringing the whole community together."

Some regional studies are already underway, Arnett said. The Maricopa Association of Governments and the Transportation & Infrastructure Moving AZ's Economy Coalition, (TIME Coalition), are involved in transportation studies.

And the Urban Land Institute is taking an "urban reality check" and looking at growth in Pinal, Maricopa and part of Yavapai County.