

Talk of the Town: Prescott best move for AED, public

GARY BEVERLY Special to the Courier

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Prescott recently announced the collapse of negotiations to protect the Granite Dells from the destructive private “South Annexation” development proposed by Arizona Eco Development (AED). Save The Dells recognizes and appreciates the City Council’s recognition of broad public support for public open space throughout the Dells and their attempt to negotiate a solution.

No details of the failed negotiation were released. We regret the lack of transparency and await the developer’s next move.

Previously, AED threatened to seek annexation to Prescott Valley (PV) or to develop its property in Yavapai County. Save The Dells believes that annexation into Prescott is by far the best alternative for the land, the developer, the city, and all citizens.

Save The Dells wants the Prescott council and the public to understand that Prescott can drive a hard bargain without fear of losing out to PV or the county. AED faces significant disadvantages and huge expenses by attempting to develop the South Annexation in Yavapai County or Prescott Valley.

Assuming that Prescott would not cooperate or facilitate if AED attempts annexation to PV:

Utilities: Sewer, power and water lines must be extended for miles at huge expense to AED.

Water: Prescott “penciled in” 300 acre-feet per year (afy) of groundwater for this development. PV has zero credits to support a 100-year assured water supply. AED proposed to exchange a claim (not a right!) to 375 afy of Granite Creek surface water in exchange for Prescott’s municipal water service – that’s impossible for PV. Therefore, AED would need to acquire over 415 afy of Assured Water Supply credits costing at least \$7.5 million (using AED’s values). Water cost in Prescott: ZERO.

Aquifer: If annexed to Prescott, all wastewater would be dedicated to permanent recharge. If annexed to PV, wastewater would be used to support added development. Although all added development increases the overdraft, development in PV is more damaging.

Transportation: Prescott surely would not subsidize, or permit, road connections causing AED additional expense, habitat destruction, and possible obliteration of the Iron King trail.

Litigation: Courier archives reveal that PV and Prescott have battled over annexation boundaries. City officials have said that a 2001 agreement, now expired, did in fact define annexation boundaries. If PV tried to annex the Dells, old wounds would be reopened; litigation would probably follow.

For development into Yavapai County as a small lot (<2 ac) subdivision without Prescott's cooperation, the transportation and aquifer impacts are similar. Water is more difficult; AED would need to build a private water storage, treatment, and distribution utility in order to use unreliable Granite Creek surface water, plus purchase millions of dollars' worth of credits, and build a wastewater treatment plant. AED would face intense public opposition directed at the Board of Supervisors.

A wildcat subdivision in the county would be sleazy, illegal, and extremely undesirable. By selling large lots (>36 ac), AED would accrue far less revenue. These "dry lots" served by individual wells and septic systems are dangerous. Well water in the Dells may be contaminated with radon gas, and septic systems may contaminate the lakes and Granite Creek.

Clearly, annexation into Prescott is the best alternative. Save The Dells urges AED and Prescott to resume negotiations to permanently preserve the remaining undeveloped portions of the Dells as part of a publicly accessible Regional Park and Preserve (see www.savethedells.org).

In this poker game, Prescott holds five aces.

Gary Beverly has been a business man in the Prescott area for more than 40 years.