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## More than 400 attend open house on proposed 3,300-home development

### Weighing in on Granite Dells

By [Max Efrein](#)

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The ire was palpable as members of the public ushered into the Prescott City Council chamber Tuesday evening, May 8.

More than 400 people had shown up to an open house hosted by Arizona Eco Development's CEO Jason Gisi. The topic discussed was a proposed 3,300-home development that would include land north and south of the Granite Dells Parkway interchange on Highway 89A. The proposal requires the annexation of about 3,000 acres into the City of Prescott.

The maps provided by Arizona Eco Development show the areas of proposed annexation (on left), along with the basic plans for development on the acreage. The right map is a close-up view of the area on the left. (Arizona Eco Development/Courtesy)

The development began its public review process by the City of Prescott in September 2017. Arizona Eco Development's CEO, Jason Gisi, intends to now submit an official annexation request to the city in about the next week so that the project can continue moving forward in the proposed fashion.

The area of most contention within the proposed development is an 864-acre parcel located in, around and adjacent to the Point of Rocks (the mass of granite formations that borders the Peavine and Iron King trails) in the Granite Dells.

Many of the people who came to Tuesday's open house are associated with Save the Dells – a group of Prescott-area residents committed to preserving the Granite Dells landscape as permanently protected public open space.

As it stands, some of the most prized portions of the Dells are privately owned by Gisi and two men he has partnered with. While they understand that much of the public would like to see the Dells remain untouched, their primary goal is to make money either by developing the land or trading the most valued portions of it to an entity like the City of Prescott in exchange for other assets, such as cash, water rights and other land or infrastructure.

"It's a primo piece of ground," Gisi said to those who attended the open house.

“It has significant monetary value. We’re looking for fair value received for the assets that we give. It’s a rational position and it’s a position that we’re, frankly, quite lucky to be in.”

Though several members of the Prescott City Council and the city’s staff were in attendance at the meeting, they refrained from participating in the conversation.

“The council is not commenting,” said City Attorney Jon Paladini during the meeting.

When asked via email why this was, Prescott City Manager Michael Lamar wrote back “We still don’t have an application from AZ Eco Development; so I think it’s premature for us to comment on any potential negotiating point/points.”

Several members of the public, however, were more than willing to voice their opinions during the meeting.

“We’re upset because we’re getting screwed,” said Prescott resident David Humphrey.

“Have you looked at the beautiful Dells? Do you want them ruined,” said Prescott resident Linda Frith. “They’re so gorgeous, I can’t imagine anybody wants to build a bunch of houses back there. It’s very sad.”

Joe Trudeau, chairman for the Save the Dells group, spoke on behalf of the group during the meeting.

“This is the last chance Prescott will have to ever protect this piece of property,” Trudeau said.

He believes the primary onus currently lies on the City of Prescott and what they decide to do about the proposed annexation or trade deal.

“I hope that the city is really ready to listen to the people on this, because this is a make or break moment for the city’s character,” he said. “We have an opportunity here to create a well-thought-out park that can accomplish biodiversity perspectives, provide recreation and open space and provide opportunities for solitude.”

At the same time, Trudeau understands this is a negotiation.

“Our position for Save the Dells is, let’s get a fair shake for the taxpayer, let’s get a fair shake for people who love our community, and let’s make this an equitable trade,” he said.

“I want Jason to succeed, get rich, buy a Rolls-Royce and let me go for a ride in it, but I want him to do it in such a way that it doesn’t compromise the Dells’, or the Peavine, or the Iron King, and we can do that.”

Gisi has already been speaking with Trudeau and others about the potential solutions to this conflict, and he welcomes more feedback.

“If someone has a great idea, if somebody has a proposal, we’re happy to listen,” Gisi said.

However, the clock is ticking.

“Time is always of the essence once we start the process,” Gisi said.

If the City of Prescott ends up not approving the proposed annexation and development, Gisi said he and his partners will start exploring other options.

“The easiest thing is for us to revert back to a 36-acre subdivision — where I need no approvals from anybody, because state law allows that activity — and we go sell it,” Gisi said. “Second option would be looking at annexing into the Town of Prescott Valley instead of the City of Prescott.”

The open house meeting on Tuesday will not be the last chance the public gets to ask Gisi and other involved parties questions about the development. Gisi anticipates hosting at least two more open houses in the undetermined future.

Additionally, a number of studies having to do with traffic, drainage and archeology will still have to be conducted before any groundbreaking takes place. All of which Trudeau helped make clear as well.

“Let’s be fair, like [Gisi] said, this is just the beginning of the process,” Trudeau said.