

Avondale looks to future

City holds visioning session for General Plan update

by Marc Buckhout
staff writer

Avondale conducted a visioning session at City Hall July 27 in which the public was asked what it envisions for Avondale in the future, as part of the General Plan 2030 update.

Project Manager Stacey Bridge-Denzak and the rest of Avondale's city planners attempted to take input from a 38-member resident committee made up of community stakeholders including elected officials, Avondale residents and business owners.

The task is to get a sense of Avondale residents' views of their community and determine how identity affects Avondale's growth.

State law calls for a community's General Plan to be updated every 10 years. Avondale's General Plan was last adopted by the City Council on June 17, 2002, and ratified by the voters on Sept. 10, 2002. The next General Plan election is scheduled for August 2011.

"A General Plan is a guide or blueprint for how Avondale will grow in the future," said Brian Berndt, the city's Development Services director. "Strong community input is key because the plan should embrace the community's values and vision."

A premium on open space

During the course of a 2½-hour meeting, the committee discussed three questions:

1. What is your favorite place in Avondale and why?
2. What qualities/characteristics would you use to describe Avondale?
3. What would you like to preserve about Avondale's heritage?

"Our residents put a premium on open space and natural environments."

— Stacey Bridge-Denzak
General Plan update project manager

From those questions, Bridge-Denzak said some of the same values and priorities were consistently voiced.

"Our residents put a premium on open space and natural environments," Bridge-Denzak said. "People like Avondale's small-town atmosphere, but big city amenities. Several mentioned Western Avenue and its mom-and-pop sense of a past era as a positive, yet they still enjoy having the commercial centers where they can conveniently find the things you can get in other bigger cities.

"The last thing was they like Avondale's diversity — diversity of people, diversity of places and diversity of cultures."

Along with the feedback from the committee, the city is seeking input from the rest of its residents. The city is putting together a more comprehensive survey for the city's Web site, www.ci.avondale.az.us, that anybody will be able to fill out.

"What we took away from the committee was enlightening for us as planners. How they see Avondale and what their priorities are will help us move forward," Bridge-Denzak said.

She stressed it is early in a process that won't produce the General Plan until late next year.

"This was just a kick-off meeting," she said. "This is

all part of a process with a capital P. This is the start of an 18-month endeavor that will be very extensive. The next step will be for the committee to work on a vision statement. From the vision statement, we'll develop some guiding principals that will show us how we are going to get to each element of the General Plan. We'll also re-evaluate the 2002 General Plan and see what's similar and what has changed."

More to come

The Avondale City Council has established some goals it would like to see the General Plan update address.

The list includes strengthening the local economy and diversifying the employment base; valuing Avondale's unique lifestyle and character; creating livable neighborhoods as a foundation; seeking sustainability and a healthy environment; integrating community mobility; and providing public services for residents.

The group's next meeting is set for 5 p.m. Sept. 15 at City Hall.

The public is encouraged to attend and participate throughout the General Plan update process. The General Plan is available on the city's Web site at www.avondale.org, and the site will be updated with information on the General Plan update process. Resident feedback forms will also be included. For information, call Bridge-Denzak at 623-333-4015.

During the course of the process, Avondale is planning to conduct four community meetings where the ideas that have been discussed will be presented.

Marc Buckhout can be reached by e-mail at mbuckhout@westvalleyview.com.