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# Downtown redo, water issue tackled at Town Hall

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Better regional water management.

Higher gasoline taxes and possibly more sales taxes to build better roads and put more buses on the street.

A development fee structure that encourages infill development and discourages building on the community's edge.

These ideas and more filtered out of five panels Monday containing more than 160 area leaders from the worlds of business, education, government, health care and the nonprofit sector, among other areas.

The panelists are participating in a four-day Tucson Regional Town Hall, planned by several community groups to find solutions to some of the area's perennial problems.

Panelists at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort also discussed the arts, Downtown redevelopment and the Tucson area's sense of place. Today, panels will discuss economic development, work-force training and health care.

But several neighborhood leaders said they were disappointed by the lack of neighborhood representation among the 165 panelists.

Only one environmentalist and five people calling themselves present or past neighborhood activists attended, compared with 17 officials from the development community.

"To think that the event will be representative of the Tucson community as a whole seems to be more than what we should expect," said Ruth Beeker, a former president of the Miramonte Association in Midtown.

Organizers said there was no attempt to exclude neighborhood leaders, although four activists including Beeker said their efforts to join the panels were rebuffed.

Two others were invited in the last two weeks after cancellations occurred, said Jim Kiser, vice president of the business-backed Southern Arizona Leadership Council, the event's lead organizer.

The panels were split on how seriously to take the region's water problems.

While most panels agreed that better regional management is needed, one panel was reluctant to say that water was a tremendous problem out of concern that would discourage some economic development. The same panel, however, was reluctant to send out a signal that everything was OK with water, said Gary Munk, who chaired that group and provided a summary of the discussion.

Members of another panel "said water is a major issue in the long term," said Judy Gignac, who chaired that group.

At morning sessions, panelists pondered questions about the region's attributes, its arts scene and the role of Downtown Tucson.

Some participants in one panel questioned why residents of areas affected by redevelopment were not included.

"The people who live in the blighted neighborhoods aren't at the table," said Renne Horton of Oro Valley. "We need

to develop some way to listen to the people," she said.

"I think neighborhoods are a problem in this community," said Larry Aldrich, president of Aldrich Capital Co.

Aldrich said the interests of neighborhood associations are "very limited, very narrow."

"We've really allowed them to tie us down," he said.

Arlan Colton, who has worked as a planner for the city of Tucson, the state of Arizona and now for Pima County, said governments have empowered neighborhoods over the past 30 years for a reason. "They define the place; produce a sense of pride." But, Colton said, they can also be "obstacles to regional development."

There were no representatives of neighborhoods on Panel Saguardo, where those remarks were made.

"I'm not sure I've heard anything new," said Pima County Supervisor Ann Day, at the conclusion of the panel's discussion of "sense of place."

When talk switched to Tucson's Downtown at Panel Cholla later in the morning, proponents of redevelopment said it should be the concern of all in the region, though some suburban panelists questioned that.

Oro Valley Vice Mayor Helen Dankwerth said many suburban residents don't go Downtown because of the perception that it's not safe, it's dirty and there's nothing to do that merits the long commute.

Paul Portney, dean of the University of Arizona's Eller College of Management, questioned whether his perception that nothing is happening Downtown is even a problem. "I'd like to see it," he said, "but I don't think the future of the area depends, importantly, on having a bustling Downtown."

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