



TUCSON REGIONAL TOWN HALL

realizing the possibilities

DECEMBER 2007

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Thousands share the vision of excellence in Tucson Regional Town Hall initiatives

Thousands of Southern Arizonans shared their visions of regional excellence over the past eight months as part of the Tucson Regional Town Hall.

The Town Hall process\ launched in early May with sessions lasting nearly four full days at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort.

Approximately 165 citizens joined in the effort. They gathered for many hours in meeting rooms to develop recommendations on how to solve the most pressing issues facing the Greater Tucson region.

Participants focused on 12 critical topics, including health care, K-20 education, economic development, water, arts and culture, transportation and recreation. Following the Arizona Town Hall model, the participants narrowed the wide-ranging discussion into a comprehensive report that was released in June.

The May meetings were just the beginning. On June 6, more than 300 people gathered at the Fox Theater to discuss the recommendations included in the comprehensive report and to add their own input on how to move forward with implementation.

Participating at the Fox Theater was a wide range of community activists, business leaders, educators, non-

profit professionals and interested citizens. Their input was fully incorporated into the initial recommendations included in the May report.

Once again, this was only the beginning. A critical component of the initiative has been the Community Voice surveys.

The Tucson Regional Town Hall wants to ensure the greatest community participation possible. Accordingly, residents throughout the greater Tucson region have signed up be a “Community Voice” and to give their opinions on critical issues.

To date, hundreds of citizens have shared their opinions on community values, the development of downtown Tucson and literacy. The citizen input that has been received through the surveys has also been incorporated as part of the original Town Hall recommendations.

Finally, the recommendations compiled at the initial meeting, the Fox Theater gathering and the Community Voices surveys are backed up by 34 separate organizations in Southern Arizona. These form the network that is dedicated to keeping the Town Hall initiative moving forward. These businesses, public and non-

profit organization are committed to enacting the recommendations. The different topic areas are now in the hands of a wide range of organizations that are driving the momentum and demanding results.

As is obvious from the flurry of activity

that began in May and has reached throughout the region, the Town Hall process is succeeding in its goals to mobilize regional leadership, to focus resources to effectively address our issues, and to position the region for prosperity in the years ahead.

Peter Likins inspires community involvement through the Town Hall

Peter Likins, President Emeritus of the University of Arizona, has provided the inspiration for the Town Hall process. As chairman of the initiative, he has worked tirelessly to ensure the collaboration that is central to the effort.

“The Tucson Regional Town Hall has energized Southern Arizona,” Likins said. “So many organizations and individuals have stepped up to the plate. The momentum is exciting, and our region will be the big winner.”



Peter Likins

Tucson Regional Town Hall wins Common Ground Award of Distinction

The great success of the Tucson Regional Town Hall was publicly recognized recently when it was selected by the Metropolitan Pima Alliance and *Inside Tucson Business* to receive the *Common Ground Award of Distinction*.

The award was presented November 2 at the Third Annual Common Ground Celebration, which honors groups of individuals who work through “challenging, important community issues, to help the greater good of the region.”

Peter Likins accepted the award and said, “The Town Hall initiative is a true catalyst for change in our region. It is inspiring that so many different organizations and individuals are collaborating on change in our region. This award recognizes the importance of and the success of our efforts.”



(Photo courtesy of *Inside Tucson Business*)

Town Hall participants accept the Common Ground Award of Distinction. Front Row: Steve Alley, Sarah Smallhouse, Peter Likins, Ramón Gaanderse; Second Row: Jacquelyn Jackson, Tara Jackson, Ann Brown, Tomas Leon; Third Row: Greg Falls, Linda Cohen, Ron Shoopman

“Community Voice” plays key role in Tucson Regional Town Hall

Who knew when the word first went out this May that hundreds of people would take the time to share their opinions on critical issues?

The Community Voice surveys have been wildly successful because they have provided essential community feedback in three key areas: community values, the shape of downtown Tucson and literacy.

“The response rate has been impressive,” said Chris Baker of Marketing Intelligence, the marketing research consulting firm that conducted the surveys. “The feedback we have received is providing great direction on how to move forward.”

So what are they saying? The 480 people who responded to the **Community Values** survey voiced strong support for people and organizations in the region to “work together for the good of the community.”

The list of issues they considered most vital to our region included protecting our desert environment, assuring that all children receive a quality education, and planning for tomorrow’s growth today.

The **Downtown** survey drew 477 responses. They had clear ideas of what is needed Downtown in five areas:

1. Add more retail, restaurants, aesthetic appeal, parks and

2. make it pedestrian-friendly;
2. Provide better housing options at reasonable prices;
3. Make it accessible to mass transit and provide more parking;
4. Invite more tourists with improved hotel options, and event and sports venues;
5. Gather professionals in urban planning and marketing to plan, market and promote the new downtown.

The bottom-line for respondents was that it is important to the community and to each of them to revitalize Downtown Tucson.

The Literacy survey drew 429 responses. *(See related Literacy story on Page 4)*

When asked what the community can do to make literacy a greater priority, 40% believed that we need to improve the quality of education and effectiveness of our schools.

The majority also felt strongly that raising literacy levels is critical to Arizona’s long-term success. This belief extended to improving literacy rates for both children and adults.

Watch for more **Community Voice** surveys in coming months. To sign up, go to www.tucson.com/Townhall.

Your voice is a critical component of the Town Hall process and is essential to the success of the process.





Building a Culture of Literacy is goal of first literacy Town Hall follow-up meeting

Building a **Culture of Literacy** is the chief goal of literacy leaders in the community, according to Steve Alley, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Southern Arizona (CFSA), which is taking the lead on the literacy recommendations that emerged from the Tucson Regional Town Hall.

CFSA kicked off the first Town Hall Literacy follow-up meeting on November 13 at the Tucson Convention Center, and nearly 125 people showed up to take part in the discussion.

“Literacy has been a top priority of CFSA,” Alley said, “and it is exciting to join forces with the Town Hall and other literacy leaders in our region. Working together, we can make a real difference in literacy levels.”

The **Literacy** initiative combines the forces of CFSA, the Literacy Leadership Council, the Tucson Area Literacy Coalition, the Southern Arizona Leadership Council and the Tucson Regional Town Hall.

SALC President Ron Shoopman explained, “This partnering is the model that we had in mind when we launched the Town Hall. We were not out to duplicate efforts. This partnership has refocused and revitalized efforts to reduce the levels of illiteracy.”

The work of the Literacy Leadership Council will be ongoing and inclusive. “Most important, Alley said, is that it is a process “that must be owned by the community.”



Steve Alley



Community Conversation on Water attracts 300 to first Town Hall follow-up meeting

Nearly 300 people attended the first Town Hall follow-up meeting on Oct. 26 that focused on an issue of great import to the region: **water**.

The large room of interested citizens were united on the need for a regional approach to water issues.

The nearly day-long forum featured presentations by County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry, City Manager Mike Hein and the head of the Arizona Water Institute, Kathy Jacobs.

A regional approach to water issues, where the city and county work together on long-term solutions, was agreed to by both Huckelberry and Hein. They stressed the need for coordinated planning and region-wide discussions.

Hein also stressed that values around water usage needed to change, pointing out that for people to conserve, they need to know

why they are doing it and that they are part of a widespread effort that makes sense.

Climate change and environmental water needs were also part of the discussion. There was agreement that climate change and the fast growth of our region are helping to raise awareness about the need for a sane, regional approach to water in our region.

The experts noted that there is enough water in the region to provide for two million people, double today's population. However, if the drought continues to drag on, there could be tough consequences.

There was lengthy discussion at the forum on how water issues should be integrated into decisions on land-use planning and growth.

Audience members, most of whom were not water experts, expressed strong opinions on the need for city and county



Sharon Megdal



Ken Abrahams

leaders to work together in this area.

Sharon Megdal, director of the University of Arizona Water Resources Center and a co-host of the forum with Peter Likins, said the agreement voiced by Huckelberry and Hein for the need for a regional approach was important. "I feel more hopeful that the region's approach to growth and water issues will not be fragmented," she said.

Megdal also said that she was very pleased with the overall success of the Community Conversation on Water. "We all know water issues are complex and that water is one part, albeit a very critical part, of a larger puzzle. What we hoped to do was emphasize the importance of a common understanding and an ongoing water dialogue. In that, we were successful," Megdal said.

Educational initiative takes front row seat as top priority in Town Hall process

Education emerged as the top priority in the Tucson Regional Town Hall report, with educational access for all reigning as the most important issue for the region.

To assure that educational issues remain center stage, the Business and Education Roundtable (BER) and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce have stepped up to the plate as hosts of the K-12 education recommendations. What that means is that they will drive the issue to make certain that the Town Hall recommendations are considered and that a plan to implement the best of them is developed.

The first major step in this process took place on November 11, when more than 100 members of the BER convened to review the Town Hall recommendations and prioritize those with the best chance of successful implementation.

BER co-chairs Roger Vogel and Denny Dearden reviewed the Town Hall recommendations that fell into four key

areas:

1. Educational access for all;
2. Focus on student achievement;
3. Excellent teachers; and
4. Qualify, well-funded schools.

Participants then broke into small groups, which were tasked with ranking the specific recommendations within each of the four areas, *and* developing actions that should occur to transform the recommendations into reality.

A top priority is creating more funding streams for education. As Vogel told attendees, "We have to inspire people to open their wallets." There was also agreement that convincing the state legislature, especially in the difficult budgetary times we are in, would be a challenge.

Next steps include more planning meetings of education groups in the region, culminating in a region-wide Tucson Regional Town Hall follow-up meeting in April 2008.



Roger Vogel



Denny Dearden

Mark your calendar for a wide array of Town Hall follow-up meetings

- December 13 – Workforce Development Meeting
Hosts: Tucson Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Investment Board, Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities, Business Education Roundtable Workforce Committee
- December 14 - Early Childhood Development Host: United Way
- January 2008 - Land-Use Planning Host: American Institute of Architects Arizona, Urban Land Institute, Pima

Association of Governments, Pima County, Tucson Association of Realtors

- Spring 2008 - Regional Appearance Hosts: Pima Association of Governments, American Institute of Architects Arizona, Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities

- Early 2008 - Arts, Culture and Recreation Tucson-Pima Arts Council, Nature Arts Culture Heritage Organizations

- 2008 - Higher Education - University of Arizona, Pima Community College

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We are all in this together!
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