



**Paper: Arizona Daily Star, The (Tucson, AZ)**  
**Title: Water use, growth collide; consensus best remedy**  
**Date: October 30, 2007**

Our view: Latest water **conversation** shows urgent need for regional growth plan

////

Friday afternoon, Doubletree Inn. Midtown. About 200 people are gathered in the main ballroom discussing water, and nobody is nodding off. In fact, Richard Carlson, an economist who moved here from California five years ago, gets up and asks a pointed question that gets the old hands chuckling:

How did Tucson get to be this haphazard, sprawling mess? It looks like nothing was planned.

County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry is on the stage, sitting next to City Manager Mike Hein. Huckelberry, we assume, knows the question is a good one, even if it belabors the obvious.

"Welcome to the West," he says, "where the only thing that's hated more than government is planning."

There's little doubt that Huckelberry understands the mentality that has led to urban sprawl. Not only have county policies contributed to it, it was subsequently Huckelberry's vision that led to one of the few attempts at controlling it.

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, which he incubated, in effect creates an urban growth boundary at the edges of the metropolitan area. It does so by providing a scientific rationale for the preservation of native flora and fauna.

That conservation plan, however, is not enough. It's useful to the extent that it directs our attention inward toward the city center, but it does not control all the elements - such as decisions about extending utility lines - that contribute to sprawl.

The metropolitan area continues to creep toward land that is undeveloped and still relatively cheap, which creates more stress on the area's water supply, its roads, its economy, its air quality, its police and fire services and its need for more schools and libraries.

Clearly, the metropolitan area needs what its most myopic thinkers abhor - it needs a solid, specific regional growth plan.

Other states require such plans. Arizona does not, but that may change. House minority leader Phil Lopes, a Democrat from Tucson, attended Friday's **conversation** on water. Afterward, he said he and Senate President Tim Bee, a Republican from Tucson, plan to meet with Huckelberry to discuss how the Legislature might be helpful in the planning process for the metropolitan region.

This is an important step.

Two stories that appeared in the Star over the weekend reaffirmed the importance of looking more closely at regional planning. The stories basically chronicled the inescapable fact that Tucson's suburbs, both incorporated and unincorporated areas, can't take care of themselves if they continue worshipping at the shrine of frontier values.

Anti-government, independence, tax-free living - all are fantasies that fall apart when real-life consequences are considered. People in Tucson and Pima County, for example, want police and fire protection, good roads, a transportation system that works, better schools, garbage collection and a dependable supply of potable water.

All of these expectations cross jurisdictions, but in places like Oro Valley and Sahuarita, there is no property tax to cities to help pay for these civilized amenities. The future of such communities depends almost exclusively on growth - on construction sales taxes and impact fees.

A policy that depends exclusively on growth is bound to eventually fail, since eventually growth in the desert must be linked to a finite supply of water. Some communities in the region are beginning to realize that major changes, including adopting a property tax, may be necessary.

At the very least, communities in the Tucson area should create one entity that can negotiate for additional water for the entire region. A unified voice for the region would be far stronger than individual communities negotiating for more water from the Central Arizona Project and the American Indian tribes, and for the retirement of agriculture.

"Our biggest crisis is that we are not in a crisis," said Ken Abrahams, of Diamond Ventures.

Most communities don't act until their backs are against a wall and they're forced to do something, he said.

However, at Friday's Tucson Community **Conversation** on Water, sponsored by the Southern Arizona Leadership Council, it was clear that there is a widespread perception that growth and water are on a collision course. The public wants solutions, and, for the first time ever, there appears to be a growing consensus among community leaders that what we need is less talk and more action.

The impetus for action must come first from voters. We should demand that our political leaders review all of the costs and benefits associated with growth, acknowledge that we live in a desert, and advocate a realistic regional growth plan based on accurate water-delivery projections.

Copyright 2007 The Arizona Daily Star

*Section: EDITORIALS*

*Page: A4*

*Copyright 2007 The Arizona Daily Star*