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## Nearly 100 attend



The annual Sonoita Crossroads Community Forum attracted many people who braved the cold to meet at the fairgrounds. Crossroads Forum

Goals and concerns of community are voiced

By Robert E. Kimball

Nearly 100 people braved a cold Saturday morning to attend the Sonoita Crossroads Community Forum annual meeting Jan. 27. They were dressed warmly in coats, vests and hats knowing that Pioneer Hall at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds was not likely to be toasty.

Annie McGreevy heads up the Friends of Scenic Highway 82 and organized the Development and Construction Review Committee (DCRC) to interface with the Arizona Department of Transportation and local residents. McGreevy is the contact person both for ADOT and residents interested in ADOT issues.

McGreevy and representatives from ADOT reviewed preliminary plans for rebuilding the dangerous curves north of Sonoita on State Route 83 between Milepost 44 and 44.5.

According to an ADOT study of a recent five-year period, there have been 55 accidents on SR 83 in the last five years. Many of those accidents were fatal and occurred between MP 44 and MP 45.5, which is the eighth highest spot for accidents in Arizona where vehicles leave the road. It's the highest in the state for motorcycle crashes.

### Roadwork planned

Plans call for widening the shoulders and straightening somewhat the center curve. The wider shoulders will also make more room for bicyclists, but the shoulders will not be designated as bicycle lanes, ADOT said.

Construction could start in 18 months and may take up to six months to complete. Plans call for reseeding the disturbed areas with a native grass mix and natural vegetation, according to ADOT.

Information about the proposed improvements to SR 83 will soon be available on the Forum's Web site at [www.sonoitacrossroads.org](http://www.sonoitacrossroads.org).

### Water presentation

Sonoita resident Carl Bock talked about the history and the importance of water in the Sonoita valley. In his opinion, a drought in the late 1890s and severe overgrazing damaged the land's ability to retain water. Without sufficient grass, water runs off and causes erosion. Prior to the 1890s the Santa Cruz and San Pedro rivers ran

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year round, he said.

Bock analyzed more than 100 years of local rain records and came to the conclusion that average rainfall has not changed during that time. Therefore, managing the land for water retention could help retain much of the water that now runs off.

He suggested that landowners who add water-retention strategies to their property should receive property tax credits. Strategies could include; fewer roads in new developments and land-management plans that would retain water that is now running off.

Santa Cruz County Supervisor for District 3, John Maynard said in an interview at the meeting's close he liked the idea of a tax credit as an incentive for land owners and developers to protect and enhance water retention strategies.

#### Managing grazing

Local rancher Mac Donaldson said ranchers needed to take the long view; that land needed to be managed so that ranching would be sustainable over time. He said the carrying capacity in the Sonoita area was one animal unit per year per 20 acres. There are areas not too far from Sonoita where the carrying capacity is one animal unit per 100 acres, he said.

He said there were three categories of ranches in the area - those with three to five head, those with 30 to 100 and big ranches as large as 72,000 acres.

Owning a cattle ranch is like owning a yacht, "You have to be prepared to lose money if you own one," he said.

#### The Babocomari

Annie Gibson, a local real estate broker and one of the 35 family members who own the Babocomari east of Sonoita, said that \$6 million of real estate was sold last year in the area.

The pressures for development are very strong. Her family has invested more than \$100,000 for a 2,000-acre master plan for the ranch. She did not explain what the master plan would include.

Land use is not

zoning

SCCF board member Bill Eifrig told the group that a land-use plan is not zoning; it is a plan that should be consulted by the county when zoning decisions are made. If the plan is followed then patch work zoning could be avoided.

Lucy Thomas, an Episcopal priest from Nogales who also conducts services in Sonoita, told the group that she came from a ranching family in California.

"The Sonoita area makes me feel like I'm back on our ranch in California," she said. Experiencing nature can be a spiritual experience for people if they can find unspoiled nature to enjoy, she said.

Her family's ranch in California is protected by the Williamson Act, which created green space around the San Francisco Bay area. She said there was political pressure to repeal the act.

#### Review

President Stephen Strom reviewed the Forum's accomplishments in 2006. They included: policy to guide growth proposed and accepted by the Sonoita Crossroads Community Forum (SCCF) Board and the Forum membership; established close working relationship with the Amado/Tubac-based CPIT group; SCCF Board provided critical input to prospective developers re-proposed projects near the Crossroads; supported efforts to establish a constructive working relationship with ADOT; SCCF members played an active role in supporting efforts to oppose the proposed open-pit copper mine at Rosemont; established constructive dialogues with land trusts (SEALT; AOLT; TPL); SCCF and the Sonoran Institute; hired an



intern (Adam Springer) to carry out 'asset mapping' (cultural; historical; natural), provides a context for evaluating proposed developments; continued active dialog with Santa Cruz County Planning Office; updated website to allow for community dialog on key issues; SCCF active mailing list exceeds 270 individuals.

#### 2007 plans


Strom said plans for 2007 included: facilitate a landholders' conference (late spring); aim is to identify goals and concerns of landholders; work with land trusts, Sonoran Institute and SCC to organize a meeting re 'tools' needed to facilitate land use planning; identify sources of funds (land trusts; federal) that can be used to facilitate, purchase of conservation easements, other creative means to preserve open spaces, preserving and/or promoting economically viable ranching; continue dialog with developers planning projects near the Crossroads and elsewhere in northeast Santa Cruz County; be proactive in approaching active or prospective developers/landholders; broaden SCCF membership; include more landholders, ranchers, business people; strengthen working relationship with CPIT, they share many of our goals and will enhance our political reach; develop closer working relationship with Patagonia; complete asset mapping (historical; cultural; natural); provide guidance to developers re key community assets/values.

#### New board, officers

New board members elected at the meeting were: Bob Barnhill, Rosana Kazanjian, Linda Kennedy and Pat Robinson. Officers elected after the meeting were: treasurer, Bill Eifrig; secretary, Susan Scott; vice-president, Brian Mosely; and president, Stephen Strom.

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