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Debbie Yost

## Real Estate Reality

# WHY DO WE WANT TO LOOK LIKE A SUBURB OF PHOENIX?

As I've been hearing all the population projections for the next ten to twenty years, along with the estimated costs for paving all the streets we'll need to drive to all the new homes that will be built to house all the people that will sleep in Casa Grande and drive to the metro areas to work each day, one word keeps popping into my mind. WHY?

As the time to drive from Casa Grande to Phoenix gets longer and longer due to all the traffic congestion, and my blood pressure increases as I am forced to step on the brakes repeatedly on a FREEWAY, I wonder how much worse it will be in five or ten years. Will it take an hour and a half to drive 50 miles instead of the 40 minutes it used to take? I-10 between Casa Grande and Phoenix reminds me of Los Angeles freeways, especially as I notice the brown cloud hanging over the Phoenix Valley. I understand that if the Gila River Indian Tribe agreed TODAY to expand the freeway, it would be fifteen years before construction of additional lanes would be completed. When I hear that Casa Grande will be home to 300,000 people in the next 20 years, I can't imagine how crowded I-10 will be with ten times the traffic on its existing four lanes.

As I read about people's objections to the pink cat on the sign on Cottonwood Lane, I wonder why we want to turn our lovely, unique small town of Casa Grande into a vanilla sea of cookie cutter homes and franchise restaurants and shopping options. Think about it. Aren't you getting just a bit tired of beige stucco?

If I wanted to live in Phoenix, I would have made it my home instead of Casa Grande. I love the unique, locally owned stores and restaurants. I love that our downtown has flavor. I love driving through the older neighborhoods of Casa Grande and feeling a homey blend of character, colors and landscaping. I used to love being able to drive to anywhere in town in less than ten minutes. I loved being able to park close enough to the post office to walk in it. I loved knowing the folks in the stores where I shopped, and that the profit from my purchases actually stayed in the community.

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not anti-growth and anti-regulation. I also don't envy our elected leaders and local government employees as they try to manage and regulate a tidal wave of population growth. I believe they have a Herculean job ahead of them.

I believe the real question that needs to be answered is "What do we want Casa Grande to look like in 20 years?" Do we want a sea of similarly colored homes on streets that all look the same? Do we want to not only have every fast food restaurant franchise, but also every franchise big box store and restaurant chain? Or will we allow a percentage of them, while encouraging and supporting individual ownership of restaurants, businesses, and retail establishments by providing as enticing tax advantages as we provided for the new retail mall developers? Is there a way to provide more financial incentives for a locally owned business to expand than we do to bring in a new franchise?

Do we want to see real neighborhoods of varying house style and type, where people use their front yard for more than a walkway from their door to the vehicle they use to battle others on the freeway on their way to work?

Do we really want to have 300,000 people living in our city or would half that amount be large enough to support the retail and commercial options we all desire to have locally instead of driving to the Valley? I guess the real question to answer is "What do we want Casa Grande to be when it grows up?" I'm guessing the City Council and Planning and Zoning Commission would love to have some input from all of us as they make the difficult day to day decisions that will have so much impact on all of us who call this area home. A wise person once said, "When the vision is clear, the answers are easy." It's time to create a vision of what we want for Casa Grande, instead of accepting the tidal wave that's headed our direction.

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