

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**GILA COUNTY, ARIZONA**

Date: March 1, 2007

**JOSÉ M. SANCHEZ**

Chairman

**STEVEN L. BESICH**

Clerk of the Board

**TOMMIE C. MARTIN**

Vice-Chairman

By: Stacey Espinoza  
District Two Assistant

**SHIRLEY L. DAWSON**

Member

Payson Public Library  
Payson, Arizona

PRESENT: José M. Sanchez, Chairman; Tommie C. Martin, Vice-Chairman; Shirley L. Dawson, Member; Steven L. Besich, County Manager/Clerk; Bryan Chambers, 2<sup>nd</sup> Chief Deputy County Attorney.

The Gila County Board of Supervisors met in a Work Session in order to participate in a meeting that was conducted by the Payson Regional Economic Development Corporation and Rim Country Regional Chamber of Commerce at 7:00 a.m. on this date. Ms. Tina Bruess, Executive Director of the Rim Country Regional Chamber of Commerce, posed questions to each Board member and then each Board member responded with their answers. There was no discussion between any Board member and Ms. Bruess. A summary of the questions and answers are as follows:

**Question One: Facilities.** If there is a new tax for Gila County facilities recommended by the current task force (note for the record: officially known as the Gila County Facility Planning Citizens Advisory Committee) and voted on by taxpayers, how do you propose to address the disparity in facilities when the north will be developing facilities for functions that do not currently exist and the south is only improving facilities that already exist? Is this another example of northern tax dollars paying an unequal share?

Chairman Sanchez stated that he is unaware of facilities that do not currently exist in the northern part of Gila County. He advised that duplicate

services are provided in the southern and northern areas of Gila County and it is the only rural county in Arizona to provide duplicate services. With the appointments of citizens to the Gila County Facility Planning Citizens Advisory Committee, the County is looking at recommendations from the citizens on the type of improvements that can be made throughout Gila County. Supervisor Dawson reiterated that Gila County is the only county to duplicate services in two locations. She inquired of those in attendance if there were services not being provided and she asked everyone to let the Supervisors know what services were needed.

Vice-Chairman Martin also inquired as to the type of services not being provided in the northern part of Gila County and she also agreed that the Supervisors need to be aware of services that were not being offered. She stated that rural counties are outgrowing jail facilities with the changing society and need to be looked at. A handout was provided of all services being provided which included the locations and if they are available in Payson on a full time basis. The County Treasurer and Public Fiduciary do not have an office in Payson; however, they are easily available by appointment.

Chairman Sanchez stated that while attending a meeting of the Central Arizona Association of Governments in June, 2006, he sat with the mayors of the Town of Payson and Town of Star Valley and discussed how to best approach issues that were of distress to Payson, Star Valley and Gila County. The idea of a "meet and greet" was mentioned, whereby cities, towns, businesses, and local elected officials within Gila County would get together to exchange information and share concerns. He will work on arranging such a meeting. At this time Chairman Sanchez asked Mr. Steve Besich, County Manager/Clerk of the Board, whether he had any comments to add.

Mr. Besich commented that there is a general misconception regarding the statutory authority of counties. He stated, "Counties are an arm of the State and when there is trouble at the State level, people start to look at where to shift costs, where to shift responsibility and when things are shifted, there are not always the dollars to take care of the issues that go with it. No other

county in the State deals with the type of expenses incurred at Gila County.” Gila County has four percent of privately owned land within a forty-seven hundred square mile area. Of that small percentage, streets, roads and mining properties are included.

**Question Two: Budget.** What process do you use personally in deciding project funding priorities and level of funding for each of those priorities? What process do you use as a group to make these same decisions?

Vice-Chairman Martin commented that a vast majority of the budget is committed to providing statutorily mandated services. Mandated services include the Sheriff’s Office, jails, court system, family attorneys, indigent health care, probation, indigent legal, and long and short term health care. Vice-Chairman Martin stated that Gila County received a break on the cost last year for these services; however, more money is paid out by Gila County than any other county in Arizona. Of those services that are provided, many are unmandated and are paid with tax dollars. Funds that may be expended at the discretion of the Board include economic development, economic protection, fire prevention, water development and community agencies. She also stated that Gila County is comprised of four percent private land of which two and one-half percent is mine-owned land and one and one-half percent is privately-owned land. One and one-half percent is located in the southern part of the County and one-half percent is located in the northern part of the County. Vice-Chairman Martin advised that from a financial standpoint, in the past the County was totally dependent on the local mines, livestock, and lumber and the tax burden has now shifted to the taxpayers. She stated, “The environmental movement has moved off the backs of the public engines and onto the backs of the homeowners; that has to shift back.”

Supervisor Dawson stated that the County needed to secure its northern area from the threat of fire to make it safe and secure in order to protect the tax base in that area. She advised that a majority of services are mandated and no choice is given on how the County spends dollars. Supervisor Dawson stated, “The State is trying to put a big percentage back onto the County for

Restitution to Competency. The State does not feel it is their problem and counties feel they cannot afford to pay for them.” She advised that Gila County fought hard to save tax dollars in long term health care. She also believes that the tax burden needs to be taken off the backs of the homeowners and small businesses.

Chairman Sanchez advised that on an annual basis, staff and elected officials meet to discuss each office’s budget requests. Once those numbers have been put together, the preliminary budget is presented to the Board of Supervisors for review and approval. He stated that there is only so much money coming into the County and the Board must decide how best to spend that money. He also stated that the County tries to set a little money aside for contingency purposes. Chairman Sanchez advised that last year the County dipped into its contingency fund to purchase water bladders and pumpkins which were needed during fire danger season. Chairman Sanchez stated, “The idea was to have a water source available out in the forest in case something started out here and could be accessed quickly.”

**Question Three: Education.** Workforce has been identified as the number one problem with businesses in northern Gila County. The necessary support to address current and future workforce issues cannot be obtained through our local education system. Therefore, we have initiated serious discussions at other levels about the creation of a workforce development facility with various programs to meet local needs. Would you support this facility and its programs? How?

Supervisor Dawson advised that the County, community college and a workforce development facility would need to combine efforts to provide workforce training to citizens. She stated that the mining industry is improving and as a result, there will need to be a trained workforce to fill vacant mining positions.

Chairman Sanchez supported the idea of a workforce development facility being a central clearinghouse for the college to work with local schools for training. He advised that because of the Workforce Investment Act, local

workforce development areas provide One-Stop Centers, which are centers that provide many types of services to assist citizens in securing employment. This program partners with businesses that hire and pays the salaries of these people. Chairman Sanchez provided an overview of the REPAC (Re-Employment and Pre-Layoff Assistance Center) Program which assists people who have been laid off from their particular employment at the mines or lumber industry to be re-employed and re-trained in another career. He stated, “The idea of a workforce development facility would be a good way to look at what the County has, what is available, what is needed to put this together and determine how to best utilize what the County has and what the future needs might be.”

Vice-Chairman Martin agreed that citizens need to be able to reach information and if the County has some place and sees that a better workforce development facility is needed, a better job can be done at the community college. She stated, “Go back to the high school level and see different places where people can plug into this information.”

Steve Besich stated that Maricopa Community College has a skill center and if it is a concept that Gila County would want to meld into the post secondary education system, those interested could work hand in hand to make it happen. He stated, “People in business and industry are looking for qualified, educated, skilled craftsman and that would be the idea here.”

Chairman Sanchez spoke of the Governor making education a priority. One of the important things Gila County did was create a provisional community college district, which saved the County one million dollars in out-of-county tuition. He stated “The Maricopa Community College Skill Center offers everything from meat cutting to wiring to partnering with local car dealerships that provide new vehicles to train technicians that will be needed to service vehicles, as well as flexibility with students’ schedules. Education and economic development are key to Gila County.”

**Question four: Economic Development.** Support for economic development is skewed between northern and southern Gila County. What is your vision of

the future for the economy of northern Gila County and how do you plan to implement that vision?

Chairman Sanchez advised that a key element for economic development in northern Gila County is water - finding it and how to best get a hold of and manage the water situation. He stated, "The towns and County need to bring resources together to develop how we are going to best manage our water resources."

Vice-Chairman Martin advised that southern Gila County needed the boost that was given to them to look after themselves as something other than a defunct mining town. She stated, "The resources in the southern part of the County such as water, flat ground, railroad, number of T1 lines that flow into Globe/Miami out of San Carlos and the infrastructure are resources the northern part of the County will never have. With development of the east valley, development will run right over the Globe-Miami area." She advised that the northern part of the County has over a million dollars in water development in water resource in fire breaks. She stated, "Last year over a thousand fires were started, eighteen of those were considered catastrophic by the Forest Service and were put out with the use of the bladders and pumpkins. In this district, Gila County has the number one fire risk grading of any community in the west - Pine/Strawberry first and Payson second. **In one year the risk was dropped by about thirty percent.**" **Vice-Chairman Martin Stated that unspent allocated money saved from fighting fires in the district was sent to this district to reinforce existing fire breaks, for the six hundred thousand from last year, combined, the district received a million and a half back from Federal government.** That is economic development from an economic protection standpoint.

Mr. Besich requested that any budget requests from the Rim County Regional Chamber of Commerce should be addressed sooner rather than later.

Supervisor Dawson stated, "Gila County has a lot of assets and they need to be managed wisely for the benefit of the entire County and that is what the County is working towards."

Ms. Bruess called for public comments or questions at this time. Steve Candrall of Payson suggested that the citizens and the County continue communication and dialogue with a weekly information spot in the local newspapers in northern and southern Gila County. He stated that citizens, who were not able to attend today's meeting, would like to be informed of what is going on in the County.

Ms. Bruess suggested sending the Chamber the information which could be included in the Chamber's monthly newsletter.

At 9:20 a.m., Supervisor Dawson excused herself from the discussion to attend a radio program in Payson. At this time Ms. Bruess thanked the Board and the meeting ended.

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Jose M. Sanchez, Chairman

ATTEST:

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Steven L. Besich, County Manager/Clerk