

A Williamson Valley Community Plan – Are you being served?

A Brief Case History told by Q & A's. { ADVANCE \d 7 }

The story told here was documented from county records, in part, but much more has resulted from personal experiences of the many volunteers that produced the Community Plan currently awaiting action by the County.

Q – What is the current status of the latest Plan that was presented to the County in 2007?

A – Ask the county, and please let us know if you learn anything.

Q – You say the **latest** Plan, have there been other attempts to get the County to accept a Community Plan for Williamson Valley?

A – Indeed there have been, with the earliest record found being 05/15/1996 . The minutes of a Joint session of P&Z and BOS reported as follows: Williamson Valley Community Plan status report and discussion of on-going process to prepare and complete the Community Plan. “Mr. Rozycki stated that this particular Community Plan had been on-going for a considerable length of time and that a great deal of progress had been made. He said that the community had been more involved in this project than was the norm, had submitted responses to surveys and involved themselves with the effort.” “He concluded by saying the Williamson Valley Community Plan was agenized for the May 22nd and June 6th, 1996, Planning and Zoning Commission hearings with a projected/target date for the Commission referring the matter to the Board of Supervisors for consideration in July.”

Q – Why have other attempts failed to successfully result in the County accepting a plan?

A – One can only guess and only the County Supervisors can answer this question. Looking at the records there has been much lip-service paid to the matter but looking at actions of present and earlier Supervisors one is reminded of Mark Twain’s statement that “actions speak louder than words” A reason most frequently given is that the plan should represent the wishes of the majority of the residents of the plan area and not just a “vocal minority.”

Q – Is that a valid reason or an excuse?

A – Those preparing the current proposed plan constantly asked the question what did the majority of respondents indicate in the three surveys (one sponsored by the County) on a particular matter. The County, on the other hand, tried to weight factors to favor certain groups; e.g., they claimed that large land owners should have more say than say, small land owners. Remember the idiom “Do yourself what you advise others to do”, or perhaps the more familiar version “Practice what you preach.”

Q – Why is a community plan advisable anyway?

A – “Supervisor Street said that the Williamson Valley group needed to form into some plan if they wanted to control what was going to happen with their community and what goes in out there as there is a lot of open space available.” [BOS Meeting Minutes 01/29/03]

Q – What are some of the hurdles thrown up by the County hinder progress on the development of a Community Plan for Williamson Valley?

A – The area has been called “a housing development,” or “corridor” [Mr. Spedding] or “municipal influence area.” [Ms Hoffman] “Mr. Spedding said they could do a community plan if they wish to form into a community or if they would like them to form into a different plan.” [BOS Meeting Minutes 01/29/03] Comment: It seems a bit late to be picking these nits as an earlier Director (Mike Rozycki) had used the term six years earlier and it was unchallenged in the records.

A₂ – A request for survey results of the survey produced for Dewey-Humboldt resulted in our being given a package of some pages of a report with many (actually most) pages missing. It reminded one of a letter received from a relative serving military service in a war-zone during WW II. Certain words had been cut out of the letter. This situation seemed analogous to our situation except whole pages were missing rather than just words in our situation.

A₃ – A listing of addresses was for the then current P & Z Commissioners was requested in order that we might mail them a correction to an earlier version. Clark was told by a Planner for the County that they did not give out that information but if we were to mail them to the County Office in her name that she would see that they received them. So we (the earlier Steering Committee) did just that and we were later told that we could pick them up in the office. They had not been delivered as promised. No explanation for this breach of promise was offered.

A₄ – County Staff mailed out a copy of an unofficial version of a plan draft to large land owners within the plan area along with a very negative letter of the plan that Supervisor Thurman had received from a large land owner and asked for comments on the plan. The Committee and a County Staffer had compiled a list and mutually agreed to the recipients. Those receiving that special mailing were, for the most part, not on that list. We were not concerned about that but the unprofessionalism of using an unofficial version and “poisoning the well” with the negative letter. We have no idea if Supervisor Thurman knew of this use of a letter he received?

A₅ – Supervisor Springer stated at a public meeting recently that a problem that she had with the plan was the fact that there was an area within the City of Prescott that was within the Plan area. That area was within earlier plan mappings and it was stated that because Williamson Valley Road was the only route that residents there could use in entering or leaving their property. This was back in the 1990's. That area was also within the area mapped and agreed upon by County Staff and the Steering Committee working upon the plan back in 2004. Also the City of Prescott and the County have an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) for a project that affects that area. Why, after years of apparent agreement, is it now a matter of concern?

Q – Where has the funding for the development of the current plan and the communication of it to residents, stakeholders, and appropriate others? From the County?

A – Absolutely not! It has nearly 100% come from residents contributions. Other than some occasional copying of public record materials for our use, and that has not always been the case, they have waived charges. A few maps have also been produced at no

cost. On the other hand we have had to purchase the various listings of property owners which we used for mailing out material to all residents.

Q – Why have some Community Plans been paid for at taxpayer’s expense; i.e., by the County, while others have been produced/financed essentially by the respective communities?

A – “Supervisor Davis said that in the past the County had hired consultants to do community plans and that it had cost a great deal of money. He said the new process for community plans was driven largely by the citizens and that he thought that was a key piece of the process as the Board looked at doing community plans elsewhere in the County. He said that staff could act as a sounding board for the plan groups, but that it would cost less than using consultants. Chairman Springer said she would say that was a good reason to not ever hire consultants for something like this. She said the Cornville document contained a great deal of research and historical information that might not have been included if a consultant had been involved.” [01/26/05 BOS Meeting Minutes]

Q – Why did the current five-lane highway (most recently referred to as a freeway) come about?

A – “Supervisor Thurman said the ranches on the north end of Williamson Valley Road would eventually be subdivided and that was why four to five lanes were needed on Williamson Valley Road. [01/03/05 BOS Meeting Minutes]

Q – How did the five-lane concept come about?

A – October 28, 2004 Public input meeting held by Yavapai County Public Works Department. Proposed improvements to Williamson Valley Road are shown as a two lane road with some left turn lanes and deceleration lanes for right turns or a two lane road plus a continuous center lane for left turns with deceleration lanes for right turns.

November 2, 2004 Carol Springer elected Yavapai County Supervisor for District 1.

November 10, 2004 Civiltec Engineering Williamson Valley Design project suspended. Phil Bourdon e-mails john@civiltecengr.com asking them to suspend design work. Civiltec letter to Yavapai County also claims that the 4 and 5 lane concepts evolved as a result of public meeting.

In an email from the then candidate for Supervisor for District #1 Ms. Carol Springer sent the following in response to Williamson Valley resident concerns about Williamson Valley Road Improvement;

“The county Public Works Department presented 2 plans at a recent public hearing. Both these plans proposed 2 lanes with some minor differences. After hearing some citizen input and thinking about the proposals myself, I asked Public Works to go back to the drawing board and come up with a third alternative. A four lane road plus a center turn lane. The first two plans included a turnout right lane at the many side roads along the route (Shadow Valley Road to Outer Loop Road). Because of the high volume of current and proposed traffic, I feel it is worth considering a roadway that would provide both safe right turns and left turns while maintaining a consistent traffic flow lane. Passing on a two lane is extremely dangerous but because of the many side roads passing lanes on the

right are not feasible. Additionally, the expected growth in the area will require a roadway that simply must be accommodating more volume. It would be a better use of taxpayer money to build it now rather than have to duplicate the efforts (and costs) in a relatively short time.”

When we were preparing the survey (2005) we sent a copy of the survey to the county for your comments. On 7 March 2005 I (Clark) was forwarded a copy of an e-mail document that was sent to Mr. Walter Burcham by Elise Link. Mr. Burcham provided an introductory comment which stated, “Here is the Counties response to the Survey.” There was about a page and a half dealing with comments relating to specific questions on the draft survey. Germane to the highways questions were the following comments, “Should delete 22, 23, 24. These questions may be misleading because it has already been decided, based on traffic counts, that it would need to be a four lane.” Those survey questions were as follows:

- 22) Retain WV Rd. as a two-lane artery:
- 23) Increase the number of pull-out (turn) lanes at major road intersections:
- 24) Upgrade WV Rd. to two lanes with a continuous center turn lane:

At a regular meeting of the BOS on September 6, 2005 you stated, according to the posted minutes of that meeting, “Chairman Springer said that one of the issues she believed people were not aware of with regard to the survey was that the County had asked that a question about how wide Williamson Valley Road should be not be included in the survey because the plan for a four-lane road had already been approved. She said there was a plan for the road for quite some time, noting that even though the County had requested that particular question not be included in the survey it was included anyhow.” Your quote alludes to a single question of “how wide Williamson Valley Road should be ... ,” however there were two question, beyond those mentioned above dealing with the that matter; i.e.,

- 25) Upgrade WV Rd. to four lanes with a center turn lane at major intersections:
- 26) Upgrade WV Rd. to four lanes with a continuous center turn lane:

The County had not asked but rather told us to remove questions (“Should delete 22, 23, 24.” is a declarative rather than interrogatory sentence.) That is a minor point. The major point is that when the Williamson Valley Corridor Planning Committee (the Steering Committee) considered that comment it was decided that in view of the fact that we were unaware of that decision of “how wide Williamson Valley Road should be” already having been an official decision; i.e., it had been posted to be considered at a public meeting, was then discussed at a public meeting (or at least the opportunity for the public to provide input was publicly advertised), and then acted upon as an announced agenda item, by the Board of Supervisors; it was then decided to leave the questions in the Survey. We felt that the purpose of the survey should be to provide an opportunity to find out what the people wanted rather than to make assumptions about what may or may not be the case or to provide information about what the people were going to get.

We have tried unsuccessfully to document when, where and how it was decided. We would appreciate your clarifying those points for us. Specifically, what is/are the date(s) when “how wide Williamson Valley Road should be” (or matters relevant to that question) was announced as an agenda item, when it was discussed (and what that discussion was) and when the decision to make Williamson Valley Road a four lane highway with a center turn lane for a part or all of its length. What was the vote for or against? These questions remained unanswered to this day.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The Williamson Valley Community Organization (WVCO) has evolved from a long line of dedicated community citizens who have dedicated their time, efforts, and money in order to have some say in the Valley’s future. To that end, those citizens have prepared the Williamson Valley Community Plan. If the Plan were adopted by the County, the rural character of the Valley would be maintained and reasonable growth would be accommodated. That plan has been submitted and resubmitted to Yavapai County for incorporation into the County General Plan. The plan has languished with and unwanted by the County. The “sticking point” has always been Williamson Valley Road. The Valley “folks” would love to have the road upgraded to provide turnouts and left-turn lanes. Not the County! Since a new District 1 Supervisor was elected 4-years ago, the County dropped such plans, and embarked on making Williamson Valley Road a 5-lane expressway with medians, not unlike Pioneer Parkway. If and when that expressway is constructed, the character of the Valley will change forever and you can expect commercial development to follow its path. (See previous newsletter for “commercialization article”)