

Pinal County Comprehensive Plan Alternatives Workshop Executive Summary



In February 2008, six “Alternatives Workshop” events were held throughout Pinal County. The purpose of the Alternatives Workshops was to reveal the three land use and transportation alternatives developed and to receive feedback from participants on some of the tough choices and trade offs for Pinal.

Casa Grande, Gold Canyon, Kearny, Maricopa, SaddleBrooke, and San Tan/Queen Creek hosted Alternatives Workshops; a total of 284 participants signed in at registration, though more attended the events. The following report summarizes the results of these six events. Specific meeting summaries for each Alternatives Workshop event are available as an appendix to this executive summary.

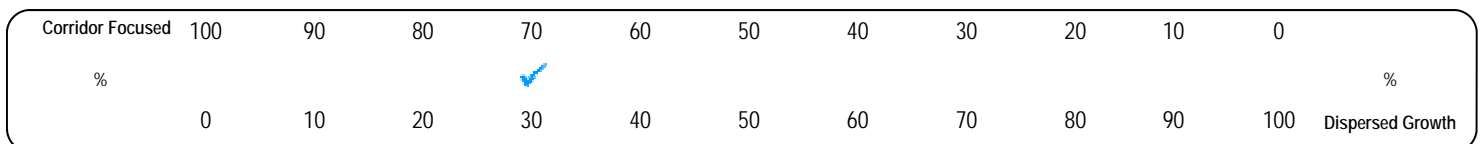
The Design Charrette was the fourth public involvement activity of the Pinal County Comprehensive Plan Update process. Participants of the Alternatives Workshop were provided a handout on how the three Alternatives address the Vision, as well as copies of the three Alternative maps (see appendix).

Participants were led through a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation that outlined how the three Alternatives were developed, followed by a systematic review of the Alternatives. Participants were not asked to ‘vote’ for a specific alternative, rather, they were asked to provide input regarding land use, open space and transit in Pinal County, as well their opinions on several potential features for Pinal County, including a commercial airport, tourism and commuter rail. This input would then be used to craft a preferred alternative.

Tough Choices: Land Use, Open Space and Transit

Land Use

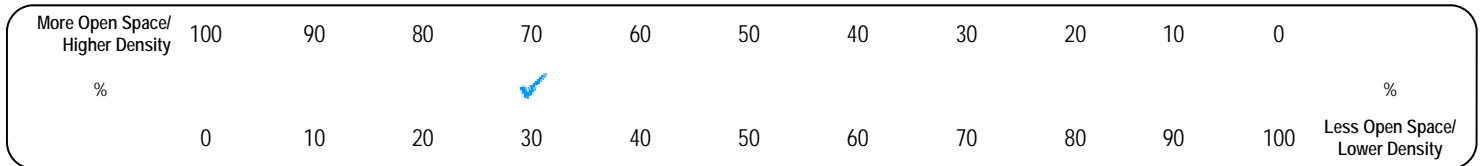
Three land use and transportation alternatives were developed: Trends, Dispersed Growth, and Corridor Focused. The Trends Alternative depicted the continuation of current residential and commercial development, which, if sustained, could not fulfill the tenets of the Pinal County Vision. Dispersed Growth and Corridor Focused were two Alternatives that addressed the Vision in two different ways. Dispersed Growth allowed nodal development, placing mid- and high-density activity centers across the County. Corridor Focused concentrated high-density activity centers in central-Pinal. Participants were asked which of the two land use philosophies they liked best, ranging from 100% Corridor Focused (located on the far left of the response instrument below) and 100% Dispersed Growth (located on the far right), or somewhere between.



As reported above, the average response of participants was 70% Corridor Focused, 30% Dispersed Growth. Of the communities represented at the six events, each averaged a response that favored the “Corridor Focused”, though, at varying degrees. This input provided the Comprehensive Plan Team with the direction to consider land use that concentrates development in Pinal’s central corridor, but with some consideration to the eastern portions of the County as well.

Open Space

While the Dispersed Growth and Corridor Focused Alternatives each applied the recently adopted Open Space and Trails Master Plan, it is the Comprehensive Plan that will have to identify the tools to implement the protection of those lands. Therefore, Workshop participants were asked how they felt regarding the relationship between density and open space: would participants tolerate higher density in some places of the County in order to provide larger swaths of open space in other parts of the County (an option reflected on the left of the following response instrument) or would participants prefer lower density with smaller pieces of open space (an option reflected on the right of the instrument).

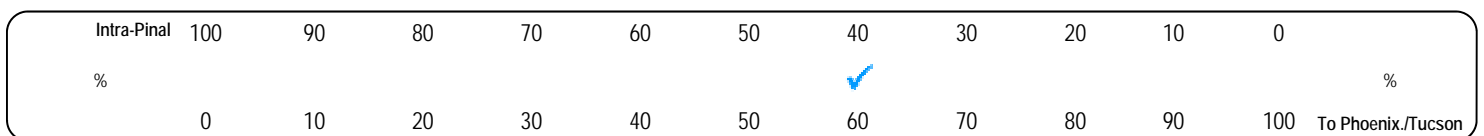


Participants averaged a response of 70% more open space/higher density, 30% less open space/lower density, as depicted above. When looking at the average responses from each community represented at the six workshops, all communities averaged a response that favored a philosophy that allowed higher density in some portions of the County if that provided the opportunity for larger swaths of open space in other parts of the County.

The responses provided by residents regarding land use and open space provided the Comprehensive Plan Team the direction to concentrate higher density development in central Pinal, to help achieve an open space plan that preserves large swaths of land throughout the County.

Transit

Transportation needs have been central to this ongoing study, and one facet of addressing this need is the implementation of transit (or, public transportation options) in Pinal. Participants were asked whether they preferred transit options that connected Pinal communities (an option reflected on the far left of the following response instrument) or transit opportunities that took them to out of Pinal, to Phoenix or Tucson (an option reflected on the far right on the instrument.)



As shown above, participants noted their desire to have transit opportunities that both connected communities in Pinal, but also transit options that allowed residents to get to Phoenix and Tucson.

Features for Pinal

Participants were also asked what “features” depicted in the Dispersed Growth and Corridor Focused options they preferred. The results follow:



61% of event participants favored a commercial airport. Participants who favored the feature cited the reported need for a commercial facility in the future, as well as a desire to preserve the lands necessary for the airport now to ensure compatible land uses surround the future facility.



61% of participants favored commuter rail between Phoenix and Tucson. Participants who favored the feature cited it as a solution to address transportation needs as well as environmental protection. Use of existing rail infrastructure was also noted by attendees.



39% of participants favored a Tourist Train—a concept born from the Design Charrettes held in the Fall of 2007, and illustrated as feature in east County. Participants who did not select this alternative cited the financial costs, and suggested it as a private venture if desired at build out.



50% of participants reported favoring ecotourism in the eastern part of Pinal County. Participants who favored the option acknowledged the natural resources and scenic environment in east County which would make ecotourism an excellent economic venture for the region, but cautioned that extreme care is needed to preserve the sensitive area and the potential economic resource it brings.



29% of participants favored Gateways, a concept introduced in several Charrette maps back in the Fall of 2007 which ensured that visitors and residents would know that they entered a different place (as opposed to land which one traversed to get between Phoenix and Tucson.) Those who did not favor the Gateways concept often desired resources to be spent towards necessary infrastructure first.