



President's message

Two thousand and fifteen ended on a pessimistic note with the rejection of the County bonds at the November election. So the 95 million dollars that would have gone to the purchase of open space will not be available. In rejecting the bond, some people asked, do we really need to preserve more land? Haven't we done enough already? Indeed, much land is already preserved in our region, and indeed one of the joys of belonging to TMA is the success we have had in conjunction with other community groups and local government in saving such gems as the Sweetwater Preserve and the Painted Hills. But the character of our region depends on keeping natural areas connected to each other. We cannot let these areas be cut off. Not only is broadly connected nature more visually appealing, but the animals and plants also depend on it. The diversity of nature declines, sometimes very sharply, when natural areas are cut off from one another.

What can we do? Conservation is a long-term goal and works best when clear plans are made and followed. The County has the Sonoran Desert Conservation plan, which recognizes the need for broad connections between the natural areas of this region, but how well is this plan being followed? The County can be commended for much effort in preserving open space with funds from Bond elections in the past, and the failed November bond election would have done much to continue the process in the fulfillment of Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. But where it has run into trouble is in zoning. Many areas of the foothills of the Tucson Mountains have been up-zoned to one house or more per acre, which greatly reduces its value to wildlife especially if residents do not respect the natural values of their properties. For this reason TMA has been fighting for the retention of SR zoning, which restricts development to one house per 3.3 acres. A recent TMA success was the County's decision to retain the current zoning for a parcel of land on Silverbell Road north of Sweetwater Drive.

But it is not realistic to oppose up-zoning everywhere, and so this is where TMA's plan, the River Corridor Initiative, announced last spring, comes in. The idea is that the land along the Santa Cruz River is a natural corridor, heading north, providing broad connections between the Tucson Mountains and other areas. But to continue to function in this way, several conditions need to be satisfied. Development near the River cannot be too dense. SR zoning or better must be retained wherever still present. The degraded flood-prone land next to the river channel much of which is owned already by local government, must have its natural values restored wherever possible. Finally, broad wildlife corridors must be retained across the foothills area of the Tucson Mountains to the Santa Cruz River.

Retention of low-density zoning can help maintain these corridors, but gets us only partway there. Although buildings may only cover one third of a property, if its natural values are not respected it can be degraded and be useless as a wildlife corridor. This is where TMA's habitat competition comes in. The idea is to encourage preservation of the natural values of your property, or restoring them, if through some previous misfortune, they have been lost-see details on this competition elsewhere in this newsletter.

Purchase of strategically located open space naturally provides a much better guarantee of preserving a wildlife corridor. Hopefully, the people of Pima County will, before too long, pass another bond package to allow the County to buy important parcels of land preserving the critical biological connections on the landscape, and retaining the wild character of this region that we all love. In the meantime, however, the County is not sitting on its hands. Some past bond funds are still available, and a little more money has come in from other sources. Although tiny in comparison to the need, they still have potential to secure some parcels of importance to wildlife corridors. TMA has been asking to help advise on the selection of these parcels. In these small ways, we can approach 2016 with a little more optimism than 2015 closed. In our democracy, much depends on the people making their wishes known loudly and clearly. In this presidential election year, much is at stake, both locally and globally. Make your voice heard.

Peter Chesson

Painted Hills Cleanup

The Painted Hills Clean up on November 7 was a resounding success. Several TMA members, including two board members, showed up to assist the County, and several students from the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department at the UA joined in along with some GPANA members. Large volumes of trash dumped from Anklam Road were removed in preparation for opening the Painted Hills to the public.

Habitat Competition

We have a winner for 2015: Tom Wiewandt for his property. Tom won in two categories: Best Preserved Natural Habitat, properties 3 acres and more, and Best Provision for Wildlife Corridors. Tom's property is a large almost completely natural parcel of land that critically connects the University of Arizona's Desert Station to the Sweetwater Preserve. Congratulations Tom! Tom's award will be presented at the annual meeting and picnic in October.

Although it would be hard to beat Tom Wiewandt's entry, you do not have to in 2016, as Tom will not be eligible to enter his property again in the same categories. So maybe you can win this year. Do not worry if your property is big or small, or if its natural areas are extensive. Just show us how much you cherish the natural values of your property. So have a go, it will be fun. Have some pride in your property. Details for entry can be found on our website under the habitat competition tab.

New Home Occupation Ordinance

We want to alert our membership to a revision of the Pima County Zoning Code to permit residents to engage in home-based businesses. The Arizona Legislature enacted a new statute that local zoning authorities may not restrict or regulate owners of home-based businesses with valid licenses from adding doors, shelving or display racks for merchandise; displaying temporary signs up to 24 inches by 24 inches, or selling or offering goods for sale. Other reasonable operating requirements are allowed. (ARS 11- 820.) Because of this new legislation, Pima County was required to amend the Zoning Code, particularly 18.09.030, which previously prohibited retail businesses in residential zones.

TMA advocated for limitations on the size and character of space that could be used for commercial purposes in residential zones, as well as limitations on traffic and parking. Many of our members reside on private dirt roads, and additional traffic means added costs to maintain these roads. More delivery vans related to business, in residential zones, can also mean danger for children on bicycles, etc. TMA wanted no commercial uses to be permitted on private roads not maintained by the County, arguing that it is an overburdening of the easements. As a compromise, the Planning Department agreed to limit traffic to no more than 5 clients, customers or delivery vehicles per day; and limiting parking to 2 vehicles at a time, and only one dedicated to the business; and requiring that all parking for the business be on the home site rather than in a roadway.

No more than one nonresident may be employed in the business, and no more than one-fourth of the floor area on one story, or no more than 200 square feet of an accessory building, can be dedicated to the business. Stock may be displayed indoors only, and any new structure or proposed changes to existing structures must be designed in a manner in keeping with the residential character of the dwelling.

Cell Phone Tower at Camino de Oeste Fire Station

A majority of the TMA Board wanted to oppose placing any such equipment on one of our scenic corridors. We had opposed such placements along Sweetwater Drive in the past. But we had polled our membership last year, and only two members had opposed this, while dozens responded with a 2-to-1 preference for the water tower design proposed by the service provider. This is a classic case of the two parts of our mission being in collision with one another. On the one hand we want to bring needed services to the Westside, and improved cellular service falls into that category; but on the other hand we want to preserve the scenic beauty of our Tucson Mountains and their foothills. Our members spoke, and so the Board felt compelled not to oppose this.

There was an appeal of the water tower design that had been approved by the County Hearing Administrator. However, the majority of the Board of Supervisors voted to also support the water tower design, so this will be the design that Verizon uses for its cell phone tower installation at the Fire Station, sometime in the near future.

Southline Transmission

Southline Transmission is a company that has proposed upgrading the electrical grid from Southern New Mexico to the Tucson area. The line would increase grid capacity to mitigate congestion and to allow additional capacity for renewable energy transmission. The line would cross Bureau of Land Management land, a small amount of private land and in the Tucson area upgrade existing lines that are administered by the Western Area Power Administration. This upgrade area in Tucson has the greatest impact on the Tucson Mountains in the Tumamoc Hill area.

In this area, Southline proposes to increase the 115 VK line to 235 VK. The towers would have to be increased from the old wooden H style at 75 feet to metal poles that are about 50 to 60 feet higher. However, there would not be as many towers as exist now. The current route that would be upgraded would need another 50 feet of width added to the right of way causing more impact on the desert in the Tumamoc area. After input from area stakeholders, the Agency-Preferred Route would move the existing route that runs through Tumamoc Hill and route it around the area along the existing roadways starting from Starr Pass Rd, west to Greasewood Rd., north to Anklam Rd., east along Anklam and St. Mary's and reconnect with the original right of way for the existing line. This route would eliminate the existing part of the line that runs through Tumamoc Hill. The Agency Preferred Route seems to be a better route to lessen the impact on the sensitive desert environment on Tumamoc Hill and help preserve the view shed. However, the downside of this route does bring high voltage lines near Tolleson Elementary School and Cholla High School. According to the study, even with the increased voltage, the configuration of this upgraded line would not increase the electromagnetic field (EMF) that is potentially harmful to people and especially children. Moving the line closer to schools is a concern, but the EMF levels will be within non binding safety standards and the risk is accordingly negligible.

The final Environmental Impact Study has been completed and this Agency Preferred Route is the route recommended in the study. The Bureau of Land Management will now make a decision sometime early this year on the Right of Way route and whether to move forward on the project in a document called a Record of Decision. Once this has been decided and published, it can be administratively appealed. If you are interested in the issue you can go to the BLM website for more information at http://www.blm.gov/nm/st/en/prog/more/lands_realty/southline_transmission.html.

Board Elections Results

Ivy Schwartz, Jackie Day, Charlene Pesquiera and Debbie Hicks were all re-elected to the board for their new two-year terms.

The 2016 TMA Board Members are:

Officers

Peter Chesson, *President*
743-7223

Judith Meyer, *Member*
743-8058

Paul Eckerstrom, *Vice President*
743-1380

Charlene Pesquiera, *Member*
358-1783

Jackie Day, *Secretary*
(602) 670-8568

Ivy Schwartz, *Member*
743-4251

Debbie Hicks, *Treasurer*
743-3906

Membership Renewals

Now is the time to renew your membership for those memberships that have expired, so please visit our website to download a renewal form. We will also send out a gentle reminder, for those who tend to wait until the last minute. Your dues help us continue to advocate for our Westside residents and much beloved Tucson Mountains and open space.