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US Census surprises Pinal cities

Arizona City, Eloy, Coolidge, CG data is lower than expected

By AARON DORMAN
Staff Writer

CASA GRANDE — The 2020 census results released Thursday contained a number of unusual results for Pinal County, with some cities losing population since 2010 and others whose totals are lower than previous estimates. As a result, Maricopa has overtaken Casa Grande as the most populous city located entirely in the county.

The trend of lower-than-expected totals is consistent with Arizona as a whole, which did not grow enough in population to get a 10th congressional district, as had been expected.

Casa Grande's reported population for 2020 was just over 53,600, about 10% lower than 2019 estimates. Many had expected the city's reported population to top the 60,000 mark after a recent housing boom. Casa Grande Mayor Craig McFarland said he hadn't been able to look over numbers or discuss their context with other city officials, but he did say that he found the 53,000-plus total "ridiculous."

Eloy showed an even steeper gap between estimates and official totals, losing nearly 1,000 residents to 15,600, a 6% drop over the previous decade. The unincorporated area of Arizona City also lost roughly 600 residents, dropping below 10,000 individuals.

Eloy Mayor Micah Powell said he was "shocked" by the census totals and suggested the lower numbers were possibly due to changes in the number of detainees and workers in prisons within Eloy, particularly during and after the pandemic.

"It's troubling, because we thought we'd be closer to 20,000," Powell said. "It hurts our state revenues. But we have had some construction of new homes. We're definitely getting new residents."

Coolidge Economic Development Director Gilbert Lopez also said he thought Coolidge's census numbers were low. The city has also seen a recent boom in housing construction. Lopez suggested the count may have occurred too early to reflect some of the new housing numbers.

"We hadn't gotten into the swing of people actually occupying houses when they took the census," Lopez said. "We don't know what the true number is, but we've had a lot of growth."

Lopez noted that potential developers and businesses have their own calculus and would take the new rooftops into account when potentially looking to move into the city. Lopez also said Coolidge city officials would look into the prospect of a mid-term census count for 2025, if they thought the city was growing fast enough for that to be relevant.

Maricopa Mayor Christian Price said he was pleased by his city's rapid growth but that the high totals weren't completely unexpected, noting that the numbers of new homes being built "speak for themselves."

Still, despite the positive results, Price said that there were concerns going into the census about how it would be conducted during the pandemic.

"I certainly think the count could have been better all around," Price said, "but regardless, it is what it is. We keep chugging along, and we'll continue to see a lot of business coming in, opportunity and growth if we stay on this path."

Despite describing Maricopa as a "hyper-growing" city, Price said it wouldn't be necessary at the moment to utilize a mid-term census count, as his understanding was the state included annual estimates for allocating state money, among other things.

Although Maricopa is now the largest city whose boundaries lie entirely within Pinal County, with just over 58,000 individuals, the unincorporated San Tan Valley is more populous with 99,894 residents. Other cities that are partially within the county, such as Queen Creek and Marana, saw sizable population increases as well, jumping to over 50,000 residents.

There is a Census Count Question Resolution program that allows local governments to request a review of the results. There will be a 30-day comment period for the public that opens in the fall, and the Census Bureau plans to notify local officials of their eligibility to file such cases sometime in December.



Powell



Lopez



Price

Enrollment drops in TSD

By MELISSA ST. AUDE
Staff Writer

ARIZONA CITY — A decline in student enrollment numbers in the Toltec School District will impact the budget.

Student enrollment for the first 10 days of school was 514 students at Arizona City Elementary School and 301 in Toltec Elementary School.

"That's considerably lower than our enrollment before the pandemic," district Superintendent Denise Rogers told the dis-

trict Governing Board on Aug. 9. "This is an area of concern since it can drastically impact our budget negatively."

The board on Aug. 9 approved its proposed \$5.9 million 2021-22 budget with some changes that reflect the lower enrollment numbers. The original budget was written with an anticipated student enrollment of 940. That number was changed on the current budget to reflect a student attendance number of 815 students.

The district has a carryover amount of \$323,000 from the 2021 fiscal year.

"Currently, our total expended and encumbered monies are at \$6,275,419," district Director of Finance Tim McCain told the board. "This is in excess of the amount that we will have available in the budget revision. We will be dependent upon (federal) ESSER funding to meet our expenses, which will exceed the confines of our budget for this school year."

In other business, the board approved an updated contract for the cell tower at Toltec

— TSD board, Page 2

New coffee shop in Arizona City is a hit

By DAVID CHURCH
Staff Writer

ARIZONA CITY — TumbleBeans in Arizona City is a new coffee shop located in the old Tumbleweed Market at 13640 S. Sunland Gin Road. The shop just recently had its grand opening and is quickly becoming a hit for the Arizona City community.

The coffee shop has branched out into not just serving drinks but also holding different events like live music as well as a car show.

Brian Ernst is part owner of the shop. He says that it has been a great thing to see the people of Arizona City enjoy the new addition to their community.

"Every day we have been slowly increasing with the number of people coming out," Ernst said. "It took us about three or four months to renovate this place, and we have been in business for about a week now and have been doing really well."

A resident of Arizona City for some time now, Ernst believes that the coffee shop is a way to help create community engagement.



Linda Metz/PinalCentral

TumbleBeans is a new coffee shop in Arizona City, located in the old Tumbleweed Market.

"This coffee shop has really brought the community together. We get busy in the mornings, and are still busy throughout the day," Ernst said. "It is really nice to just see the whole community come out and see some people I haven't seen in a while, so it's a good thing."

Not only does Ernst believe the shop can be a way to bring the community together, he also sees it as a tool for the local economy of Arizona City.

"We have hired about 10 people here, so we are providing jobs, and we try to give back to the community

by supporting our firefighters and first responders," Ernst said. "We do what we do out here to try and galvanize the community. The whole reason for putting all of this together was to support the community, and it has been beyond my expectations so far."

State senator takes questions at Arizona City Chamber luncheon

By DAVID CHURCH
Staff Writer

ARIZONA CITY — State Sen. Vince Leach says the recent census was "way off" for Pinal County.

Leach, R-Saddlebrooke, has been representing the 11th Legislative District, which includes Arizona City, since 2018. During the August Arizona City Chamber of Commerce luncheon last week at Heaven's View Baptist Church, Leach decided to pay the community a visit and answer questions.

One of the topics the Republican senator spoke about was the latest census numbers.

"From all indications, it looks like the census numbers were way off, not only in Pinal (County) but also in Yuma (County)," Leach stated. "We were all expecting to get enough population increase to get one more congressman. Everything points to we should have one more congressional seat, and we were shocked when we didn't get it."

Leach also shared his thoughts on the plans to extend Interstate 11 to connect the Phoenix area to Las Vegas.

"My position is we already have a road



David Church/PinalCentral

Arizona State Senator Vince Leach was the guest speaker Aug. 18 at the Arizona City Chamber Luncheon.

bed made, it's called I-10; the road bed is already there. We cannot take care of the roads that we already have," Leach said. "We can't build the third lane (on I-10), we can't fix potholes, there's a lot of things that we cannot do. We have to make it work."

Finally, Leach discussed the Arizona review of the 2020 election results.

"I will tell you this, I am sure that there

were laws, rules, regulations and procedures that were not followed," Leach said. "We, the Legislature, I think have not done our job, and now we are paying the price. And I think coming out of this, we will see where we have to tighten up regulations and rules. (The audit) took considerably longer than anticipated, but the goal was to not do it fast, it was to do it right."

New solar projects apply for land-use changes

1 is southwest of Arizona City

By MARK COWLING
Staff Writer

FLORENCE — Three new solar energy plants near Arizona City and Eloy are seeking major amendments to Pinal County's Comprehensive Plan that would allow them to build and operate.

The projects have different timelines for development in the next two to four years. Pinal County Senior Planner Gilbert Olgin told the Board of Supervisors Aug. 11 that county staff have no major issues with



Arizona Public Service (2019)

The Red Rock Solar facility is located on 400 acres about 30 miles south of Casa Grande.

any of the proposals. The board heard the basics behind each proposal but took no action.

The Sonak Solar project would change 1,882 acres slated for moderate-low-density residential to green energy production and major open space southwest of Eloy. Landowner is Arnoldo B. Burruel and the applicant is Benjamin Conor Branch, Sonak Solar Project LLC, which hopes to be operating by the end of 2025.

Arizona City Solar would change 1,667 acres now planned for various residential

— Solar projects, Page 2