

Group already plans land issue vote for '02 ballot

Monday, November 20th, 2000

By BLAKE MORLOCK

Citizen Staff Writer

By BLAKE MORLOCK

Citizen Staff Writer

Environmentalists are aiming for smaller victories after the resounding defeat of a sweeping growth-management proposition at the ballot box.

Voters on Nov. 7 rejected Proposition 202, which among other things would have required cities to establish voter-approved growth boundaries, by a 2-1 margin.

"I don't think you'll see anything that ambitious in the near future," said Pima County Supervisor Raul Grijalva, a Democrat, who helped carry the proposition's banner. "I think you'll see more-specific, targeted efforts."

"The picture isn't so pretty," said Carolyn Campbell, director of the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection. "(Proposition 202) would have given us some tools we really could have used. At least we still have the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan in Pima County."

Developers and business leaders, who spent \$4 million on an advertising blitz to help beat the proposition, are not using its defeat as justification to halt all efforts to control sprawl.

They, too, view the Sonoran Desert Plan – Pima County's ambitious effort to protect the most ecologically sensitive desert in southern Arizona from development – as a good thing.

"I don't think the worm has turned," said Tom Doucette, president of Doucette Homes and chairman of the Southern Arizona Home Builders Association. "Proposition 202 was a bad plan with uncertain results."

"We're not greedy and unconcerned," Doucette said. "We have to search for reasonable people and find ways to work together."

Tucson real estate broker and property rights advocate Bill Arnold said environmentalists should understand that voters saw Proposition 202 as an extremist measure.

“My dad had a saying: Pigs get fed. Hogs get butchered,” Arnold said. “That’s what happened here.”

Environmentalists pushed 202 in part because the Legislature has been reluctant to give towns and counties authority to curb growth.

But with Republicans losing control of the state Senate in the election, there’s a chance Democrats can get a Senate Environmental Committee created, said Tucson Democratic Sen. Elaine Richardson. The Senate is now split evenly between Democrats and Republicans.

For the past few years, bills dealing with growth had to get past Sen. Rusty Bowers, R-Mesa, who controls the Natural Resources Committee, dominated by conservative Democrats and Republicans.

An environmental committee would help get growth-management bills to the floor of the Senate for a vote, Richardson said.

“If we can get votes to the floor, we’ll find out how many people really support growth management,” Richardson said.

Sierra Club lobbyist Sandy Bahr said Richardson’s idea would help “but it depends on who the chairman is.”

Environmentalists have long pointed at the Legislature as the biggest obstacle to getting a grip on growth.

In recent years, lawmakers have given property owners the right to split lots five ways without conforming to subdivision rules and have revoked counties’ rights to downzone property.

The state has done plenty to curb sprawl, said Bowers, pointing to Growing Smarter laws passed by the Legislature this year.

“Let’s see if (Growing Smarter) works,” Bowers said. “If it’s too onerous on property rights, maybe we need to make a change. If it’s not sufficient, maybe we make a change.”

The chasm between provisions of the Growing Smarter laws and 202 mirrors the gulf between the status quo and where environmentalists want to get to.

Growing Smarter requires that towns, cities and counties draw up land-use plans that can't be changed for a developer without a three-fifths vote of the governing body.

Proposition 202 would have created growth boundaries around most Arizona towns and required voter approval of all rezonings larger than 20 acres outside the boundary. It also would have forced developers to pay impact fees for roads, schools and other public works their projects would need.

Residents would have had the right to sue to force local governments to abide by the proposition, and governments that violated the rules would have faced tough sanctions.

Bahr said the Sierra Club plans to lobby lawmakers for impact fees.

"I think there's an opportunity to push a little bit more to require developers to pay their fair share."

Arnold said he's ready to fight any such measure.

"I view impact fees as a politician's dream to demonize a very small percentage of the population," Arnold said. "Is it fair to drive on a road someone else paid for? I think we should all pay our fair share."

County Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Sharon Bronson said legislators must try hard to help counties cope with growth.

"If they don't show some real leadership, there'll be more ballot initiatives in the future," she said.

One effort to bypass lawmakers and ask voters to approve preserving land is already under way. The Tucson-based Sonoran Institute hopes to get an initiative on the 2002 ballot that would preserve state trust lands, but without some of the restrictions in Proposition 100, which also was defeated Nov. 7.

But Sonoran Institute director Luther Propst agreed with Campbell and other environmentalists that sweeping growth-control measures aren't likely to succeed: "The political change when the economy is good must be incremental."

Tags: [Arizona](#), [Blake Morlock](#), [Conservation](#), [Elections](#), [Environment](#), [Land Use](#), [page-1A](#), [Politics](#), [Referendum](#), [Sonoran Institute](#), [Tucson](#)