

# High Country News

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## Tucson draws a line on sprawl

- From the February 15, 1999 issue by Tony Davis

TUCSON, Ariz. - A crowd of several hundred people burst into applause at a public meeting here, as the Pima County Board of Supervisors killed a developer's plan to turn a cattle ranch into 6,100 homes, two golf courses, a hotel, shopping areas and an airstrip.

The Jan. 12 vote, the first denial of a major Tucson-area zoning change since 1973, had environmentalists and officials exclaiming that this county of 823,000 people has turned the corner in its battle against urban sprawl (HCN, 1/18/99).

The vote symbolized a "paradigm shift" in how the county manages growth, according to Pima County Supervisor Ray Carroll, who opposed the Canoa Ranch project.

County planning commissioner Bruce Gungle said that controlled growth supporters are now in the mainstream. "Soon, the term environmentalist itself will be passé," Gungle said. "It's becoming more and more the thinking of Joe Sixpack."

Observers in the local astronomy community hailed this vote as one more sign that Tucson was becoming "astronomy valley." In the week prior to the vote, more than 2,000 astronomers from 43 states and 25 countries had signed a petition circulated over the Internet in opposition to the project.

The astronomers had complained that lights in the new development would cripple a nearby observatory run by the Smithsonian Institution. The developer had alienated many people by threatening to sue the Smithsonian unless it dropped its opposition to the project - something it didn't do.

Realtor Bill Arnold agreed with environmentalists that the rules of the development game had changed for the foreseeable future, but argued that anyone who thinks the change is permanent is fooling himself.

"This is just another point in the continuum," Arnold said. "When something (like growth control) is set up as the mainstream, it becomes a target for change."

\*Tony Davis