

City Talk Column for January 10, 2023
Community Development Department
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Comment now on the Community Plan draft

As you are looking ahead to the new year, Sedona is looking ahead to the next 10 years. You may be taking stock of what went well and what could be improved upon in 2023, and thinking about what will make for an even better 2024. This also happens to be the time that the city does the same, but over a span of 10 years. The city's goals and aspirations over 10 years are documented in the Sedona Community Plan. Collectively, over the last two years we as the community – residents, employees, business owners, the citizen work group volunteers and city staff – have been taking stock of the changes to our community since 2013: the accomplishments, the setbacks and the challenges. We have also been talking about what we want the next 10 years to look like. Part of that discussion has been to gain a better understanding of what we can change and what is out of our control.

Sedona's revised and updated Community Plan has been drafted, so please take a look, and let us know what you think. Like New Year's Resolutions, the plan is aspirational and ambitious. Looking at the previous Community Plan goals, we know that progress has been made and we have achieved many of the goals that were set forth back in 2013.

Over the last ten years, one of the most successful outcomes of the 2013 plan includes the implementation of traffic improvements. The number one issue ten years ago was traffic, and among many transportation projects completed or in the works, the city has since rebuilt Main Street in Uptown, improving traffic flow from Oak Creek Canyon to the Y, and broken ground on the Uptown Northbound Improvements Project, the extension of Forest Road to 89A west of the Brewer Roundabout and the walking and biking underpass north of the Schnebly Hill Roundabout. The city has also launched a new transit program with phase 1 trailhead shuttles exceeding expectations in ridership, and an on-demand, curb-to-curb service launching soon. You also may have noticed that the city is now in the urban trails arena, with new shared-use paths for walking and biking on Thunder Mountain Rd/Sanborn Dr, Soldiers Pass Rd, Dry Creek Rd, and Chapel Rd. All of these improvements, bit by bit will reduce traffic, because there is no silver bullet and big changes take time.

There have been many unexpected challenges in the last 10 years, such as the world-wide pandemic, the passage of an Arizona state law banning a city or town's ability to meaningfully regulate short-term vacation rentals, the increase in tourism and environmental impacts, and less tangible impacts to resident's quality of life and sense of community.

The draft plan recognizes that there are limitations to what the city can or cannot change. Example: the city cannot prohibit vacation rentals or ban off-highway vehicles (OHVs); these are controlled and mandated by the State of Arizona. What the city can work towards is a reduction in the negative, indirect impacts and efforts to improve the quality of life for residents.

Perhaps the most significant resolution in the draft plan is to increase the housing supply of both Sedona and the Verde Valley. The pandemic and coinciding with a flood of tourists to Sedona have highlighted the strong connection between our economy, tourism and housing, thus elevating the need to address Sedona's lack of more affordable housing options. At a glance you may not see housing as a topic worthy

of a New Year's resolution for the next 10 years. What you don't see is how many businesses cannot find employees to hire or cannot keep employees because they cannot find an affordable place to live. What you may have noticed is when businesses reduce their hours, raise their costs or close permanently.

To learn more about how this and other issues matter to the future of Sedona, go to the website: www.plansedona.com. There you will find information on the draft plan, how to comment and next steps. You can also attend a community forum on Thursday, January 11th at the Sedona Red Rock High School's Performing Arts Center (995 Upper Red Rock Loop Rd) between 5 and 7:30 pm. Thank you to everyone who has given us comments up until this point. Together, we've created an ambitious 10-year vision that is reflective of our community needs.