

DiCiccio details land holdings on Gila River tribe land

9 comments by [Cathryn Creno](#) - Dec. 21, 2009 08:52 AM
 The Arizona Republic

Phoenix City Councilman Sal DiCiccio has a long-term lease to develop 75 acres of Gila River Indian Community land just north of Wild Horse Pass, on the south side of Pecos Road at 40th Street.

His company, Zenith Development of Arizona LLC, also has leased 75 acres on Gila community land just outside Maricopa. The land is on the north side of State Route 347 and Maricopa Road.

What about the park-and-ride facility

DiCiccio said he has wanted to develop big-box retail at both locations since 2002. But he is unsure when, if ever, the projects will materialize.

DiCiccio, who represents Ahwatukee, took heat during his recent election campaign over the leases because of his effort to open discussion between federal, state, Valley and [Gila River](#) officials about moving the route of

planned Loop 202 extension tribal land.

Many Ahwatukee residents oppose the freeway, which would take out about 100 homes, a [church](#) and blast through part of South Mountain.

Critics have suggested DiCiccio's projects would be more profitable if the bypass route, planned to connect Chandler to Laveen, moved south.

The reality, DiCiccio contends, could be the opposite.

"Just as soon as I signed the leases, the market changed," DiCiccio said. "There's no money out there, the credit market has dried up."

It took Zenith until 2007 to negotiate contracts with tribal officials and with tribe members who own [private land](#) outside Maricopa. Now the projects are frozen because of the bad economy.

DiCiccio says because of other development in the area, it may be impossible to attract the two big box retailers he had sought for the [Wild Horse](#) Pass area. He said he now is looking at other types of commercial development for the area.

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DiCiccio said he still intends to land two [big-box stores](#) and a movie theater near Maricopa.

State officials also say it's unlikely that the 202 would be routed as far south as Maricopa Road, which is eight miles south of the current planned path.

And DiCiccio notes that the route approved now by freeway planners rolls directly past his land at 40th and Pecos. Moving it south would take freeway drivers farther away.

No matter where the freeway ends up, DiCiccio said it seems unlikely that he will make any fortune on tribal land anytime soon.

The soonest he expects to move forward with signing tenants for either area is 2012. It may take until 2014, he said.

Maricopa City Manager Kevin Evans said his community of 60,000 residents would welcome a development with larger stores and a movie theater nearby. Right now, he said, many residents drive into Ahwatukee or Chandler for shopping and entertainment.

Both Evans and Maricopa Economic Development Manager Danielle Casey said they are aware of DiCiccio's project - as well

as similar ones planned by other companies within their city limits. But they aren't counting on getting the stores or a theater anytime soon.

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