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TUCSON REGION

Out-of-state experts ride bus to size up Tucson

By Tony Davis

Arizona Daily Star

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They enjoyed Downtown's pedestrian ambiance, but shuddered at South Houghton Road's car culture.

They admired the architecture of Civano's energy-efficient homes — but not their far-flung location.

They loved the rugged, red brick homes and businesses bordering the University of Arizona, but not the endless strip centers clogging East Broadway.

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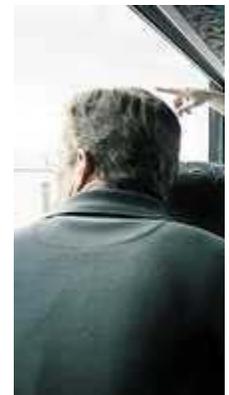
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These observations came from a team of out-of-state architects, academics and planners who Monday did what many Tucsonans seldom do — rode the bus to take a hard look at this city. The group assembled here to launch a three-day series of workshops and meetings aimed at charting a sustainable vision for Tucson's future.

Working with the local and national chapters of the American Institute of Architects, the Sustainable Design Assessment Team will present recommendations Wednesday evening for improving the area's energy efficiency, its in-city "infill" development style, its water, Downtown and

transportation planning, and the affordability of its housing.

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Susan Kliman, with observations to other environmental sustainable director of University Construction, left, and Hopkins Architects, for a three-day four

dean knuth / ar

Likes, dislike

Here are some of out-of-state planners who are developing a sustainable city's future.

THUMBS UP

- Civano's arch heavy use of n
- Williams Cen development.
- University of architecture.

The group's report will follow two days of discussion groups with close to 100 participants from the worlds of architecture, development, local government and environmental and neighborhood activism.

The purpose of this effort is to get Tucsonans to start thinking about building a more sustainable future, said Susan Kliman, a local architect who was one of the organizers of the team's visit.

"We're trying to get people to start talking to one another, and to not allow the development to go unchecked . . . to think about at what point will our water supply be nonexistent, that we provide affordable housing and that we're looking at natural resources and not always gobbling up the desert," Kliman said.

At the same time, she said, the group will focus on how difficult it is for developers to build projects, particularly in close-in urban areas, because of a lengthy development review process and recent changes to the city's land-use code.

Developers here have gotten frustrated and started building projects in Pinal and Cochise counties that many planners find less environmentally sustainable, she said.

On Monday morning, the six visiting experts — who will be joined by a seventh to shape the final document — started with the basics. Boarding a bus at the Doubletree Hotel where the meetings are being held, they headed east on Broadway, south on Houghton and Rita roads, then reversed course on Interstate 10 to the South Side. From there, they ventured north to Downtown, west to Menlo Park, north to Speedway and Grant Road, and then wound south again to the University of Arizona and the surrounding business district before returning.

Along the way, Dennis Andrejko, an associate professor of architecture at the University of Buffalo, hailed

- Potential for more mass transit and pedestrian-friendly road design because of the new Regional Transit Authority sales tax.
- Broadway as a potential light rail corridor.
- Walkability of Downtown, South Side and the University of Arizona area.
- Extensive desert landscaping in homes and heavily vegetated washes in city.

THUMBS DOWN

- Sprawling homes and strip centers on East Broadway.
- Civano's location 12 miles southeast of Downtown.
- Effects of far-flung development on costs of roads and other infrastructure.
- City-mandated walls isolating neighborhoods, hampering pedestrians.
- Questionable sustainability of car-centered roads with \$3-a-gallon gasoline.

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the Civano development at Houghton and Irvington roads as one of many pockets or clusters of good development — in this case one with pedestrian paths and walkways, with energy-saving building design and intense use of desert plants.

"I could see this mushrooming or blossoming" to other parts of the city, he said, but added that this and other quality developments need better pedestrian and bicycle connections. He called Broadway a "dismal focus of autos and strip development — we have to think more about pedestrians and mass transit, about streetscapes."

As the bus headed west on I-10 after driving past the Houghton Road Corridor, where state-owned land has been targeted for future growth, University of Michigan lecturer Kit McCullough said she was surprised at the proliferation of far-flung subdivisions and shopping areas that she felt were being "enabled" by public investments in roads, schools, and other infrastructure. She had seen similar practices occur in Austin, Texas, where she once lived, but in Austin "you wouldn't see the state selling land in the middle of nowhere for development."

Paula Reeves, a Washington state transportation planner, said as the bus headed up South Sixth Avenue that she felt the area had a lot of potential for improved transit and pedestrian access, despite Tucson's gridlike, car-friendly road network. That's in part because of the passage last year of the half-cent sales tax to build roads, improve the bus system and enhance pedestrian walkways, she said.

At the same time, she said as the tour bus headed out Broadway that she saw a challenge for pedestrians — 5- and 6-foot-high walls required by the city's land use code to separate one kind of development from another. That makes it difficult to walk to the grocery store because the walls lengthen walking distance, she said.

As the bus ventured down Houghton Road, she said, "I started to think about gas prices and energy challenges." As the bus headed east on Broadway, she saw its potential as a light rail corridor — an idea voters have rejected that is still on regional transportation plans.

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