

Incorporation makes sense for Vail

TUCSON OPINION

The following is the opinion and analysis of the writer:

The 152 CEOs and community leaders of Southern Arizona Leadership Council (SALC) believe that Pima County would be a stronger region if more of Pima County was incorporated. Not only would currently unincorporated communities that choose to become incorporated enjoy more investment in their communities, they also would command the ability to make critical self-governance decisions that others are now making for them.

Pima County residents enjoy many quality-of-life advantages when compared with our friends in Maricopa County. One area we lag significantly, however, is the percentage of state shared revenue that flows to Pima County versus the amount that Maricopa County receives.

The reason for this is simple — over 97% of the residents in Maricopa County reside in an incorporated area. In Pima County, just 65% of the population lives in an incorporated municipality. The consequence of having a much lower percentage of incorporated area is the forfeiture of more than \$50 million from the state shared revenue each year. The only way to address this issue is for our communities, population centers or Census Designated Places (CDPs) to either incorporate or be annexed by one of our municipalities.

One such community that is considering incorporation is Vail. In November, voters in the Vail area will consider a ballot initiative that asks residents whether they want to formally incorporate. If they vote to incorporate, they will receive significant state shared revenue funding to assist in their governance. However, there are many more reasons to incorporate.

Incorporation will provide Vail the opportunity to make critical self-governance decisions and control the future of their community. Currently, the citizens of Vail must make their case to the county to have a say in local matters including public safety, public services, infrastructure, and land use. By becoming a town, those same citizens will have more say in their direct local government, public safety and services as well as potential zoning and land use in their vicinity.

As an unincorporated jurisdiction, land in the Vail area could be annexed into the City of Tucson, especially undeveloped parcels that have high commercial or retail values. This is because decisions on annexation by the City of Tucson are made by the Tucson Mayor and Council with the approval of only the property owners that are subject to the annexation. This leaves those parcel annexations up to the property owners which can include the county or state if it is currently their land.

Another important consideration for residents of Vail is whether they would prefer to have a greater voice at the table regarding issues of regional concern. As a town, Vail would have the opportunity to join the Pima Association of Governments (PAG) as well as the Pima County Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). This would provide them with seats on both the PAG Regional Council and the RTA Board. Thus, the residents of Vail would have formal representation on those boards as well as a voice in regional planning and the allocation of transportation funding.

Local governance and control are only a part of the many considerations for Vail. By incorporating, Vail stands to receive about \$12-14 million in shared state revenue. The funds distributed by the state include state sales tax, highway user revenue funds, vehicle license tax and state income tax. Residents of Vail and other unincorporated communities pay these taxes, but don't get back their full

share of these funds that could be used for things like local roads and parks.

Vail can be a leader in this movement to improve our region through incorporation. Local autonomy would be good for Vail, and good for the region. By having greater control over local services, infrastructure and development, the Town of Vail can control its own future and destiny. Decisions around growth and preserving the attractiveness and viability of the community would be made locally. Incorporation makes sense — vote yes on Proposition 402.

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