

Ariz. growth discussed at Scottsdale panel

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Panelists at a Scottsdale breakfast Thursday agreed that Arizona is in no shape to handle an expected doubling of the population within the next 50 years to nearly 12 million people.

Scottsdale Mayor Mary Manross kicked off a City Hall talk about the state's growth, urging residents to think into the future.

"In 45 to 50 years, we will have double the population of Arizona," Manross said. "You can imagine the impact that will have on Scottsdale and Arizona. I don't think we are prepared."

In October, the non-profit Arizona Town Hall hosted about 150 leaders from across the state at the Grand Canyon to study growth.

The group concluded that adequate planning for water, infrastructure and other needs is not in place. But bold steps could ease the pain of adding another 6 million or more people.

Voter-approved changes to the 96-year-old system used to sell the state's 9 million acres of public lands would allow managed growth around booming urban cores, the Town Hall found.

"I was happy to see among all these groups a consensus that something has to change," said Jamie Hogue, deputy state land commissioner.

Hogue said that a new initiative being crafted by Gov. Janet Napolitano and state legislators could be the key to allowing Arizona to raise school funds with land sales while still "preserving our unique open spaces."

Hogue and other participants of the Arizona Town Hall, which was held in October at the Grand Canyon, spoke at Scottsdale's Mayor/City Council breakfast.

Manross sponsored the event to explain the Town

Hall process to residents and to discuss growth and land use planning.

Town Hall president Tara Jackson said the Town Halls bring together leaders with diverging opinions from around the state to discuss and reach consensus on a given issue. The group then issued a detailed report on its findings.

Jackson described the process as a "think tank" and said that the topic of state trust land reform led to some intense debate.

"This was the best chance either to start World War III or find a great solution," she said. "We found a great solution."

The state currently has problems with the timely sale of state lands because of an underfunded Arizona State Land Department, a lack of planning tools to work with communities and little means to set land aside for conservation, according to the report.

The Town Hall urged the state and cities to engage in public-private partnerships, strengthen oversight of unplanned development and collaborate on a regional basis.

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