

The second article in a four-part series about the Central Arizona Partnership (CAP) mission of “advocating for responsible growth”.

### **The Impact of Healthcare**

In the early 1970’s there was a valley-wide referendum on whether or not to build more freeways in the Phoenix area. The result of the vote was “No”. The overall feeling being if no new freeways were built people would not be able to move to the area and growth would slow. As we can see now that strategy did not work and the result was an area that had to scramble to stay up with the growth when it continued to happen anyway. The question that begs to be asked is whether we will acknowledge the lessons learned in Phoenix and so many other areas - will we prepare and plan for the population growth that will happen in our region or will we naively believe “if we don’t build it, they won’t come.”

The underlying question that impacts all of us is how growth, or the lack thereof, will affect our local healthcare options? Can we have a vibrant healthcare community without workforce growth and expansion, thriving educational options and housing opportunities for all segments of the population? Prescott entered the national stage and began seeing dynamic growth in the mid 1990’s and prior to that it was difficult to recruit young medical doctors to the Prescott area. Not only because of the lack of amenities, but also because there were not enough people in the community to support his/her practice and keep it viable. Employment opportunities for the spouse were also lacking.

Fast forward to today and you find that one of the largest segments of our regional economy is healthcare. A growing list of medical specialists and highly-technical, state-of-the-art healthcare services are now available in our communities, in large part because of the growth we have experienced over the last 25-years. This growth in availability of healthcare services has had a positive impact on the health of our citizens, yet we can not forget that it also has a positive impact on the well-being of our communities. As we are able to seek and find services locally we start the domino effect of recycling money (multiplier effect) in our communities where money that is spent in our local businesses turns over many times and helps many, many people.

As our medical community adapts to changes in medical care, the difficulty in finding a primary care physician is validation that it has never been more important for our region to be proactive in planning for the future. Well-managed, realistic growth can and will make our region more attractive to primary care physicians, specialists and healthcare providers, as well as providing the environment for other businesses and employers that will drive well-rounded job creation and expansion. The vibrancy of a well-planned and well-rounded economy is necessary for continued growth and expansion of the availability of healthcare services right here in our community as there is clearly a reciprocal relationship between healthcare services and a thriving economy. Well managed, healthy growth will generate more healthcare services for us all – and when we have those services available locally, we all benefit.

The Central Arizona Partnership (CAP) is a group of civic, business, and education leaders from Yavapai County who advocate responsible growth that balances economic and ecological sustainability, judicious management of natural resources, and truthful examination of and debate on growth issues in our region. Look for our future articles that will explore the relevant issues and possible management strategies associated with Education and Water Resources.

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