



# Creating a Vibrant Community 2021

FINAL REPORT



## **SWATH Creating a Vibrant Community Foundational Forums A Summary Report**

### **FOUNDATIONAL FORUM ONE – April 22, 2021**

#### **"Human Opportunities"**

##### ***Our Vibrant Community Vision***

We believe Yuma County is a thriving community with a promising future, and together we have envisioned what tomorrow's vibrant Yuma community would look like. In such a vibrant community, Yuma County residents would be connected to each other across cities, demographics, and industries. We would play to our strengths and be seen nationally as a center for agriculture, and we would highlight our position as a bi-national area, showing the strength of our proximity to the USA-Mexico border and its access to both local populations. We would have a robust educational system at all levels, a thriving arts and culture community, and job opportunities that people feel passionate about, with accessible resources, available and affordable childcare, and robust transportation options. Our higher education system would nimbly adapt to industry needs, our infrastructure would have needed improvements, and we would have greater community outreach about available resources.

One key element in building a vibrant community is educational opportunity, primarily because educational opportunities within a community are very influential on employment opportunities. An available, educated populace with workforce experience and technical certificates, who are trained and ready to work in skilled positions, is a strong lure for companies, which in turn provides more opportunity for residents. Also, companies looking to locate in Yuma County always ask about education, both K-12 and secondary, as it is important to their own relocating families and management, who look for locations with quality of education for their children. We have a guide to this process in Maricopa County, who is on the cutting edge of attracting additional businesses to their area. It is critically important that Yuma County gain insight on those conversations such that we can be successful in doing the same.

In our envisioned education system, there would be learning opportunities for all members of the community. This means not just traditional college degrees but also on-the-job workforce vocational training, programs for mothers caring for their children, and opportunities to develop skills in seniors, youth, and entrepreneurs. We also would have more early education for children and expanded childcare opportunities to take the burden off of young families, and mothers in particular. We do not need to reinvent the wheel to achieve this, as others have had successful programs in other communities and we ourselves have underutilized existing programs. It would be better to conduct outreach to our citizens, particularly current primary and high school students, on the educational opportunities already available to them. To achieve this, we can use those community members that have degrees and specialized training and are already doing well as mentors and positive influences. We would expand this system by creating better collaboration



between businesses and educational organizations to develop resources and get current resources into the hands that need it.

We would love to see all high school students with access to higher education without financial burdens. Through our outreach programs, they would understand the pathways to get there and how to achieve their dreams. While it goes without saying that quality preschool and elementary education is critical, it is equally important and essential to expose the youth to educational opportunities and/or programs that assist with developing career pathways. Students need to be exposed to different occupations so that they are empowered to explore expanded dreams for their future. It would allow students to go into a career they might not have considered if they had not been exposed early on. Expansion and inclusion of vocational training, CTE, and/or CORE curriculum is critical in this endeavor. Many local programs already offer hands-on experiences through local employers. This should be expanded and made a higher-profile effort that every student knows about and can count on. We should not hesitate to commit more resources to our primary and secondary students to enable them to do more, as they are our pipeline into the future success of our community.

Within today's economy, both parents are likely part of the workforce to meet the needs of their family. In order for them to do so, we need more high-quality, early-childhood systems that will assist parents while shepherding children through school, prioritizing education, and encouraging pathways to get to a higher education. Yuma also needs flexible employers who provide work-life balance opportunities, such as employers that allow a parent to work at home if they have a sick child. Flexibility allows adults and older students to take more credit hours at the college or pursue supplemental training or other educational opportunities around their work schedules. This is also true for working parents where childcare is the limiting factor, and they can gain more flexibility if they had better access to childcare facilities for their children. Higher education and advanced training benefits the entire family unit, as education is key to breaking the generational poverty cycle. Childcare facilities and flexible arrangements should not just be for the affluent. Our schools and community should offer more afterschool programs and early child programs to accommodate the needs of this population.

Certainly, to achieve our vision we must fight the cycle of poverty. There are several programs in Yuma County currently, but it takes outreach to make sure the resources reach all citizens and not just those who lucked upon them by word of mouth. We sell the Yuma community to visitors but not our own locals; we should be equally focusing on outreach of services to our citizens. We should consider Family Resource Centers to serve as hubs within targeted communities currently underserved. A big dream is for businesses to adopt specific communities to break the poverty by assisting with local programs for kids and residents of all ages.

Lastly, another key component of a vibrant community is accessible and affordable transportation and housing, particularly for low-income families. We would also have high-speed and reliable internet and other technology assets that bridge connections across groups and provide easier access to greater resources. Infrastructure like housing, transportation, broadband internet, and other improvements greatly influences human opportunities. Further, companies need certain infrastructure improvements in place to





decide to move here. We would have trained and educated individuals to assist with infrastructure development through targeted recruitment and training of our citizens.

### ***Expanding Collaborations: Education, Economic Development, and Industry***

To achieve our vision, collaboration is vital. Particularly, it is most important for different municipalities to work together as a region, instead of competing with each other. We need to build common language and linkage between the local leaders and systems so that we can share resources. We can improve communication through the development of pilot system partnerships. Overall, we need to collaboratively identify what makes Yuma County a great place as a whole—it may not being the “big cities” of Phoenix and Tucson, but we are a city with many opportunities for all types of people and industry with unique attributes through which we stand apart from other locales within the state and country.

Many who have never been to our area believe we are nothing more than the tiny piece of the city of Yuma the freeway passes through, and they have no idea of the size of our population and the pool of resources and talent that exists here. We should better market our county and its strengths, because our great community collaboration, particularly between education and industry, the Colorado River region and cross border benefits, and our important agriculture, business, and military assets are often an unknown to outsiders. Through Town Hall and other opportunities, we should provide a well-thought-out and cohesive story that depicts our mission and goals such that others, even our children, can see the issues clearly. People and industries will hear the story and find additional ways to bring more value to our community. Right now, we do not sell it well enough, even to our own residents. Perhaps we can better use those opportunities when the national spotlight is on us for other reasons to reframe the dialogue about our county. There are other proactive ways to broaden our message’s reach, like having a welcome committee and welcome packages for people doing business in Yuma County, which would have the additional benefit of allowing businesses to better integrate into the community and to connect with potential employees. Clearly, these types of collaborations between our existing institutions and programs would be helpful in the development of one of our key factors to community success: showing companies they can make money and thrive here with high productivity from a trained workforce and with a good quality of life for their employees. Everything else falls into place once companies know they can be successful in this region.

Development of the educational opportunities in partnership with the needs of the community is also a critical collaboration. As attracting businesses should be our ultimate goal as it serves everyone, we must provide an educated workforce capable of serving those needs while advancing their own personal success. Education needs to check in with existing businesses and potential businesses to see what they need from education in order to for companies to stay in business here or move here. Yuma County already has a great start on collaboration between education and industry, so whatever can be done to build on this relationship would be helpful. For example, one practical example would be an HR assessment regarding what types of available jobs currently exist and what skills and education are needed in order to help narrow the workforce training and education we should develop or expand on. It would also be useful to share this type of information with

young people and students so they can make educated decisions on jobs and positions available in our region as they choose their educational paths. We should consider additional and expanded collaborative efforts, like an innovation center that brings new business owners, students, and others together to meet industry needs and help grow the economic environment. Working with businesses to expand offerings of paid internships and apprenticeships also would provide needed training to our workforce. Education and business industry collaboration could help students join the work force already trained and ready to work.

Unfortunately, many residents do not realize the opportunities that educational institutions and community organizations already have in place for them despite the doors that educational opportunities open and the advantages to income and growth, particularly with business partnerships. Career and vocational technology programs in high schools have advisory boards for licensing and certification, but we need to get the word out throughout Yuma County to get a better connection with the industries we are training for. We need to concentrate on keeping the students and our future workforce here in Yuma County and avoid a "brain drain." Making sure that students and young people in the area are aware of the opportunities for them here would help with job creation and workforce retention so these people do not move away from the area with their skill sets. Perhaps a marketing or educational/awareness campaign with "educational ambassadors" would be beneficial as would programs that allow high school students to better learn about the possibilities and opportunities.

To best achieve these goals, we must also address the gaps in access to education and resources in minority communities due to transportation and accessibility. We should target poverty pockets to close the gaps between communities. We need to eliminate the stigma of 'South County' and evolve into ONE Yuma County with a united goal of promoting and developing our community.

We must also continue to enhance our community benefits to attract new residents and companies. This includes affordable and accessible healthcare for the entire family, as well as competitive salaries where people can earn more than minimum wage. Programs through organizations like the City of Yuma, the Parks and Recreation department, and partnerships with non-profits provide additional tangible and intangible benefits improving quality of life. Development of additional Pre-K and childcare options are critical.

All these items will take the involvement of many parties and interest groups, and all should have input on how they should be built and designed. There are opportunities for collective impact, where local leaders can come together to try and solve specific issues. We must identify backbone agencies that already exist and function within these spaces to facilitate gatherings of interested stakeholders to develop new collaborations, solutions, and programs.

### ***Accomplishing the Vision***

Accomplishing this vision takes leadership from individuals who the community respects and trusts. We need people from the region who bring together passion, business



investment, and non-profit resources to create plans and ideas for our community's future. The right people need to be at the table: people with strong commitment and accountability.

Business leaders are critical, particularly from our core industries. But we also need to include small, start-up businesses and entrepreneurs here in Yuma to get information on what worked, did not work, and what needs to change to allow new local businesses to thrive. Investors also need to be included. Additionally, successful collaborations need to have more than the business industry at the table. We also should include families, students, industry, chambers, agency partners, and anyone who is passionate about these issues. We need to reach more broadly to bring in community members with drive and commitment, such as members of service organizations, which are typically more engaged in local needs and have outside connections. Local elected officials need to be included in these collaborations. Cities, like the City of Yuma, which help provide the environment that young professionals seek, should also be part of the discussions. We also need to include more minorities and young people in these conversations, particularly considering our county demographics.

We must continue to develop underserved areas identified for development. The purpose is it not to focus on what we do not have, but what we envision could be, with consideration of the different goals in different sectors of the community, like transportation. We should bring leaders together to address the stigma of 'South County' to look at a broader vision for a cohesive county. We should recognize that many families are so busy working that they often do not have the time to engage, and we must seek ways to include them. Others complain of a lack of flexibility of employers in letting employees continue their education, despite the potential return on investment, and we should seek better industry collaboration with access to education. Many students lack guidance to assist in determination and development of interests and career paths, and there are opportunities for community volunteers to bridge this gap. Access to reliable transportation plagues many segments of our community. We also need better capacity on grant writers in Yuma County, especially for our local non-profits, and should seek more unified ways to get more funding. We should adopt community blocks for better understanding on the long-term vision of our various populations. Those collaborations need to be attended by the "do-ers" of businesses and the community and other critical stakeholders in order to formulate a good plan of action, with actionable and measureable milestones.

During COVID many people came to Yuma, especially from California. COVID-19 made people appreciate their family more and shifted priorities, and it may be easier to convince people to stay in Yuma or come back, whereas perhaps this would not have occurred without the pandemic. We need to capitalize on this new sentiment in our marketing plan. Growing families needs to be marketed to keep our residents and students here and encourage relocation from other areas of the country to our community.

For all these goals, involving journalism is also vitally important, as it helps educate the community on growing opportunities and promote the area to businesses here and those considering moving here. Also, social media influencers should be included, as they can highlight what Yuma County has to offer in an increasingly relevant way, particularly to younger generations.

### ***Personal Actions to Impact Change***

Committing to a change that one is passionate about or capable of effectuating, no matter how small, will make an impact on our community's vision. Many community members offered their own action goal to impact change. A selection of these goals include:

- Encourage United Way of Yuma County to continue working to break poverty cycle and educate the participants. Start to Finish!
- Articulate an elevator speech and pitch that speech to your local service agency.
- Invite people to see the wonderful things going on.
- Research the right people within your groups/agencies to further market the good things.
- Reviving plans of action that were put in place pre-COVID.
- Improving access to care.
- Opening myself to opportunities that keep the conversation moving to stir up more ideas/collaborations outside of the typical network to find common goals to unite.
- Seeking more grants.
- Coordinating fundraising.
- Offering paid internships.
- Speaking publicly.
- Continue to be involved in discussions like these.
- Support students through the educational pipeline through job attainment.
- Using the Yuma Sun to promote programs in the community.
- Creating a plan to see the big picture to determine where I fit.
- Being active in my school and helping others to participate as well.
- Bringing an innovation center to Yuma County.
- Work as a board member.
- Highlight the bi-national character of the region.
- Develop a strategic plan for economic development with input from various community groups and from different perspectives and look to South County for growth opportunities.
- Promote the opportunities at Arizona Western College.
- Convince businesses to join the conversation particularly re: bringing more business to the region.
- Serving as an ambassador and speaking positively about Yuma County.



- Providing professional training to others.



**FOUNDATIONAL FORUM TWO – June 11, 2021**

**“Access to Healthcare and Quality Affordable Food”**

***The Quality Healthcare Vision***

Members of our community agree: an important element of a vibrant community is quality healthcare. The Yuma County community has a vision of how to develop quality healthcare, which includes a desire for healthcare to be more integrative, including traditional health, overall wellness, and collaboration between specialists. These categories are necessarily broad and encompass improved access to healthcare (from traditional medical services to mental health and substance abuse providers), to healthy eating habits and food security, to expanded children’s services. Yuma County is well known for relations and collaborations across broad industry groups and interests and by using this strength to create an integrated approach to quality healthcare, we can become a model for the state. In fact, it was partnerships such as these, forged collaboratively through different groups, that alleviated the severe nurse and physician shortages Yuma used to experience. These efforts have been so successful that a shortage of space is the biggest limitation now.

Elements of this quality healthcare vision include services not just for “normal,” traditional healthcare needs, but also for the special needs populations, especially children with cancer or severe handicaps, and mental health care. For mental health and substance abuse, our community does not have enough outpatient programs to support our residents’ physical, emotional, gifted, and disability needs, especially for children and adolescents. We acknowledge that psychiatry and mental health care expansion is very complicated and will require partnerships with specialized institutions, in the hopes that we can entice qualified providers to choose Yuma as a place to practice. But solving this problem brings many tangible advantages apart from improved health, including reducing pressure on law enforcement, as implementation of mental health response teams could avoid escalation to law enforcement responses and lower incarceration rates.

Indeed, more community- and outreach-based programs focused on preventing the formation of health issues and complications altogether would serve our community well, and not just in mental health and substance abuse care, but also in traditional medical services. For example, for chronic illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, medical professionals need the training to learn to listen to patients who cannot express themselves well and find ways of meeting the patient’s total needs. Community health workers and nutritionists are key for success in this area. Only by working together with other health, education, and other community organizations can we find a solution to quality healthcare and access for our community.

Further, greater efforts to improve communication between all the various providers would significantly benefit community members regarding the status of his or her healthcare as well as provide greater access to preventative care. YRMC has enhanced healthcare in Yuma County by utilizing systems such as the MyCare patient information system, which coordinates all their contracted providers. It would be even more valuable if all providers (including nursing homes, healthcare providers, urgent care facilities, hospitals, etc.) utilized this system for patient records to avoid any mistakes.

Lastly, quality healthcare also means improving access to various clinics and more diverse medical care providers, as well as providing assistance to citizens with understanding available benefits. One large problem with access to healthcare is cost, so emphasis should be put on quality healthcare at affordable prices.

### ***Opportunities in Partnership***

As identified above, a true strength of Yuma County is its willingness to collaborate with various stakeholders and groups across industries and interests to reach innovative solutions that could not be accomplished individually. It is necessary to avoid working in isolation and collaborate with multiple organizations to meet the need. The agencies in Yuma County work very well together already but we can enhance the partnership by increasing greater participation by members of the public. With more participation, greater advantage may be taken of those resources that have yet to be tapped in Yuma County, especially as it relates to preventative healthcare and care for those who may be more dependent on others to assist them and/or advocate of them. Priorities include addressing affordable housing, transportation, technology, and healthcare. However, it is clear that the biggest focus should be on improving access to quality nutrition in order to improve the health of children and adults, as access to quality, affordable food is a key element of a vibrant community.

In Yuma County, we produce a lot of fresh produce for the entire country, but that does not mean that healthy food is abundant and accessible in our own back yard. Yuma County is actually a group of separated communities, with food deserts and a need for more access points. Further, a lack of transportation is a barrier to accessing resources and services for many individuals. Improving access to quality, reliable transportation is the type of partnership that can greatly assist with food security. While the Yuma Community Food Bank travels to San Luis, Somerton, and Wellton, we need to think of inviting ways to deliver food to the community, such as drive-thru's, home delivery, and year-round school or library pick-up locations. It is necessary to remove barriers for food box access – such as IDs or limiting families to one box a month. Currently, people that rely on the Food Bank can only get food at most 3 to 4 days a week and need more consistent access. Additionally, in many cases schools provide food to the students, including both school meals and a backpack of food for the weekend, but this service ends in the summer. Other programs are needed for the summertime as well as for the rest of the family.

Yuma County has a great potential of creating community cooperatives to work together to overcome these obstacles, particularly by incorporating non-profits into this mission and including the agriculture companies located here. Non-profit organizations can also assist with land and resources to build new pathways to deliver food, including churches, which are another key provider of food to the community. However, more grants and other financing needs to be found to increase food purchases and for any service expansion such as a mobile pantry. Consolidating the efforts of the various groups that deal in food products, including but not limited to food production, sales, and distribution, as well as those who may be aware of those who are in need (churches, etc.), would provide greater resources and outreach, decreasing food waste and improving the supply of quality, affordable food. This will take effort to address liability, harvest costs, and distribution, but

there are already some protections and solutions in place that just need to be communicated to potential organizations.

Lastly, increased efforts at education are critical. It is challenging to compete with the convenience industry that offers high-calorie dense food with poor nutrition value at low costs. We need to educate our residents about the benefits of cooking and consuming healthy food as education is the key to changing culture. A large portion of the community does not have adequate information on fueling their bodies. Trained dieticians are needed to combat diabetes, heart disease, and obesity for total health and wellbeing through education of adults and at-risk children. Even more elementally, working with local schools, colleges, and universities to offer courses on healthy food preparation is essential. It is time to bring back home economics courses to our schools. Nutrition is no longer taught in the schools, so people often don't know how to cook and eat healthy even if they have access to good quality food. Many of our schools have state-of-the-art kitchens that are underutilized. Schools should teach budgeting and financial wellness so that more families are able to provide for themselves. Putting this type of essential "life skill" training back in the schools or through other community outreach programs would help with both hunger and healthiness. Programs must be available in English and Spanish through different modalities and locations.

### ***Personal Actions to Impact Change***

Committing to a change that one is passionate about or capable of effectuating, no matter how small, will make an impact on our community's vision. Many community members offered their own action goal to impact change. A selection of these goals include:

- Providing staff and program support through Yuma County's organizational leaders, such as YRMC, Sunset, RCFBH, schools, on-profits, etc.
- Applying for grants, including the Yuma Community Foundation's \$50,000 currently available to non-profits.
- Networking with people who are passionate about the subject.
- Bringing together subject matter experts to collaborate and work.
- Taking the step to set up that one meeting that can make a difference.
- Investing in more parks and multi-use pathways at the city and county level to promote healthier lifestyle.
- Paying attention to our own personal health.
- Being willing to serve on a task force.
- Seeking alternatives to crop destruction when left unharvested, such as donation.
- Research and developing ways to logistically harvest produce set for destruction.
- Calling local government leaders.
- Advocating for folks with disabilities to better address their needs.



- Educating the public of what they can do to assist those groups that already are set up to provide assistance.
- Fostering the partnerships we have here in Yuma and connecting my patients with community partners—not just referring them to digital resources and a handout.
- Encouraging others to volunteers with non-profits.

## **FOUNDATIONAL FORUM THREE – July 16, 2021**

### **“Equitable Living (Transportation and Affordable Housing)”**

#### ***The Equitable Transportation and Affordable Housing Vision***

A central theme around all discussions in the community about equitable living is adequate affordable housing and access to resources, which hinges on available, affordable, and convenient transportation. Transportation and housing are key to economic opportunity and jobs, and all people, regardless of income or background, must have a safe, comfortable, and affordable home and reliable and accessible transportation to get to their jobs and required services.

A vision for a vibrant future includes robust housing with walkability or bike-ability. Development of affordable housing only on the fringes of communities compounds transportation issues and removes options for non-vehicular or public transportation. Currently, our community faces a two-year wait time for affordable housing. There are other ways to break this logjam, including increasing education financing and credit management services to prepare individuals for home purchases. Housing affordability targeted at 30% of budget remains a key metric, and the development or preservation of affordable housing at that percentage of income should be a priority for the community. Of course, we must always also focus on raising the income levels within the community such that people can obtain housing without a lot of public subsidies; this is achieved by expanding job training and recruiting employers, and by improving the community’s other components (i.e., education) as a whole).

As a compliment to affordable housing, residents need transportation in order to work and access resources. There must be viable transportation options for those citizens without vehicles. Public transportation in Yuma is improving and increasing, particularly with the bus system. Public transportation should have a regional focus beyond the confines of a particular city or town so that more people can utilize community services. Improved public services, such as sheltered bus stops, stops with air conditioning or wifi access, and other amenities can also make public options more attractive and useable. With improvements to bike lanes and access, we already see an increase in bicycles usage as a viable transportation option. Emerging technologies like self-driving cars could ease transportation costs and assist with burdens on personal budgets. Full-service transportation passes, supported by educational or employment, giving opportunity to transfer from different transportation modalities could also assist (busses to ride-share or taxis).

Ultimately, combining both goals can work in tandem. We should develop housing that incorporates both bicycling and walking accessibility. Housing within walking or biking distance of jobs, services, and businesses assist with both housing and transportation burdens, and alleviate the burden on current transportation and budgets.

#### ***Collaboration Between the Sectors of Transportation and Housing***

Demands for housing opportunities in live/work/play communities prioritizing walking or biking as the main transportation mode are increasingly being seen as a key to economic



prosperity and a greater quality of life. Yuma County needs to identify more opportunities for mixed-use development and the governments should prioritize it over development on the fringes of our communities. Mixed-use developments where live/work/play is walkable or rideable alleviate transportation burdens, as neighborhoods that are spread out into the countryside end up making transit harder and can also make economic opportunity more difficult. We should take advantage of current development, utilizing more density in the heart of our city, where services and utilities are already in place. Generationally, young people are not in hurry to obtain a driver's license, and public transportation options and walking or biking are increasingly more important. The next generation will choose to live in communities that invest in these transportation options and that prioritize these mixed-use live/work/play developments.

To achieve this, the community should bring the interested stakeholders to the same table, including citizens, transportation providers (public and private), and businesses, all of whom are invested in growing jobs in quantity and quality. Transportation investments will not only increase quality of life within the community but will ultimately save money for interested stakeholders. Specific collaborations between entities that make sense—such as YCAT and Arizona Western College, or builders and transportation hubs—will also be beneficial to implementing innovative solutions.

### ***Opportunities to Leverage Community Partners***

Yuma needs well-planned communities, where residents rarely need to travel for day-to-day services. We do not have to reinvent the wheel to do this: a prime example is the Verrado development in the West Valley of Phoenix. While it is located immediately adjacent to Interstate 10, the residents do not need to utilize the freeway for most services. It is an example of the live/work/play concept.

Yuma County is a combination of publicly and privately owned land. Our community needs collaboration between different governmental entities *and* the private sector. Yuma is at a tipping point with development. Investment into transportation and housing is an investment into business development and economic prosperity. The goal is career employment through business development. Simply put, companies will not consider locating or relocating to Yuma unless the workforce is strong, and this includes healthy transportation options and robust housing options to include modern mixed-use developments.

Yuma's biggest export is our next generation talent. Without collaboration, Yuma shifts into a retirement community which makes it more difficult to obtain political will for investment into transportation, education, or affordable housing. A shift to robust housing options is seen as a way to retain talent and expand opportunities. A cultural shift is needed. We must target a younger generation using YCAT and other public transportation options. If you have density, they you can create a credible transit system.

Some of these goals can be achieved simply through better communication. Political leadership has vision for future and private sector has vision for the future, but those visions are not always understood by the general public. Placing it all in a single accessible place may assist with this. Communities should be targeted with information specific to them and



via community partnership. Sponsorship programs and assistance with fees can help bring awareness of these services to communities. Ground level involvement to spread awareness and better understand community needs will also serve to tailor options to the community.

Currently, over 92% of people who use transportation for work purposes go by single occupancy vehicle. We should be viewing transit as a social service option and funding it accordingly. Funding remains large hurdle for investment into transportation methods or emerging technologies. A fair distribution of state shared gas tax as well as local control over road monies would go far in achieving appropriate funding. Obtaining knowledge of how transportation and housing is funded, through tax programs or even the business community, is essential to understanding and modifying existing programs.

## **FOUNDATIONAL FORUM FOUR – August 13, 2021**

### **“Community Safety”**

#### ***Community Safety in a Vibrant Community***

What does the vision of community safety look like in a vibrant community? Well, one with no crime! While that may not currently be possible, there are things that can lead us closer to that vision.

The community needs to deal with the root causes of crime rather than just prosecuting those that need help. This includes marginalized segments of our society like LGBTQ and other minorities. More understanding of these segments might allow us to stop crime before it starts. For example, there has been a resurgence of displaced and homeless individuals who live/camp in public places, for example in the wetlands areas. This gives a perception of lack of safety. There needs to be a serious discussion of how to solve this problem, as it leads to wildfires, crime, injuries, and other issues. This will require dealing with underlying issues that this population and first responders face. Mental health first responders could be attached to police and fire departments so we have qualified people to help with their issues.

Community design should focus on removing “pockets” of income inequality and crime rates and equalizing opportunities across town. Education regarding ongoing issues—such as drug awareness and water safety—will help reduce the number of calls through prevention, allowing available resources to focus on more serious matters. Education, retention, and recruitment requires unique thinking and an eye on targeting the youth. Interaction with the community by safety personnel will assist in preventing the need for emergency services, creating trust with the citizens, aiding in recruiting personnel, and further educating through boots-on-the-ground efforts. Access to Parks and Recreation should be expanded to keep youth engaged, productive, and off the streets. Funding parks and recreation should be a priority. Encouraging and fostering community involvement will help keep citizens safe and create ownership and pride in our community. Better lighting increases actual safety which increases the willingness and desire to go outside and get involved.

Vibrant and extensive transportation is critical to moving throughout the region and providing access to the workforce. Yuma also struggles due to a large number of people not residing in the city, but still affecting Yuma’s community safety. Retention and recruiting are a necessary focus.

When it comes to physical safety, the desert environment offers many unique challenges that could be reduced with education about desert safety. Bicycling safety can be increased with signage, bike lanes and other ways to increase visibility. Embracing bicycling as a quality-of-life issue is advantageous for both residents and visitors. These issues need to be included in municipal general plans and education efforts.

Allowing people to be free to create ideas to solve a lot of these issues can go a long way to providing viable solutions. This means, though, eliminating many government regulations and interference in the economic arena such as minimum wage laws, permits,

and other regulations of that type. Society as a whole is too complex for a group of select people to plan. By allowing each individual to plan their life and/or in conjunction with others, the marketplace will see to it that the correct solution will be implemented. However, people need to be allowed to work together with a very minimum of regulations.

### ***Collaborating Across Sectors to Improve Community Safety***

Yuma's location on the border presents unique challenges that must be faced. There is much more to our community than agriculture. Current funding for infrastructure and tourism could be directed to actual tasks and projects that would enhance our community so that we are more of a destination. But no matter how many great activities we have here, people will not come if they perceive safety threats. We all have responsibility to keep our community safe and provide opportunities for our youth so that they don't make bad choices with their life. We should use our excellent ability to collaborate and not just depend on our first responders.

When we look at the segments of our community, we should look at who is impacted the most by crime. Finding ways to help people provide for themselves, rather than just providing a handout, will improve crime rates. Poverty is directly linked to crime, and communities of color are the most impacted by poverty due to lack of higher education. Higher paying jobs will entice people to work and reduce crime. Thus, increased access to higher education can ultimately help with economic development, jobs, and reduced crime.

We need to strive for a grassroots approach rather than grasstops. Impacted communities must be at the table as solutions are formulated, or the "Smart People" "solutions" will just be a band-aid. A collaborative effort of the County, cities, education, non-profits, and churches, where everyone focuses on the greater good rather than taking credit could really move solutions forward. The Capstone Town Hall is a great opportunity to move in this direction. It is important that these discussions don't just end up as a report on the shelf. Participants should take it upon themselves, or be organized, to impact activities like municipal general plans.

Involve middle school and high school students in citizen academies and ridealongs with emergency personnel to counteract the negative messages of media and social media. Camp Inferno is a good example of such an academy. Encourage neighborhood watch groups to increase the sense of safety and form relationships among neighbors. Interaction by law enforcement with those groups, or other smaller groups, will help further dispel negative messages. Exposure is the best way to foster positive feelings and experiences. This will serve to also encourage members of our communities to pursue careers in emergency services. Create and increase opportunities for open discussion community forums – such as Coffee with a Cop.

Communities, governments, and emergency services need to embrace technology and create a bigger footprint on the platforms used by our youth to better connect with them and get them the information they need. Services and programs should be put in place around the city to provide alternatives for children after-school and provide access to strong mentors. It is necessary to target these programs to the much younger children, as high school may be too late. The criminal justice system needs to be incorporated into the



discussion and programs need to be crafted to address those who are better served by non-criminal justice programs – such as the mentally ill. There need to be more than discussions. Action plans are critical to moving forward. Being innovative in addressing these various issues will draw people to our community.

### ***Accomplishing this Vision via Collaboration***

Our communities are too interconnected to not be unified. Together, mayors, administrators, representatives of the business community, non-profits, youth organizations, Tribal, Latino, and black leaders, mentally ill and homeless advocates, etc., should be gathered at one table to develop a master plan for the County as a whole. Real-world perspectives of crime and the tough situations that lead up to it need to also be represented in planning for solutions. The Capstone Town Hall would be a good start, so all of those entities should be encouraged to participate. This can be accomplished through community service clubs and other venues.

After the Capstone Town Hall, we should form an action group that would encompass all aspects of our community and be given enough influence so that they can impact policy bodies where decisions are made. Realizing that society as a whole is too complex for a group of select people to plan, a grassroots movement may need to be created to strengthen the efficacy of this advocacy. Such movements need youth, elders, people of color, and others that are most impacted working respectfully together in support of each other. This kind of movement, along with minimizing regulation so that the marketplace will offer solutions, may help individuals properly plan their own lives, leading to true solutions.

We should focus on the younger years and getting all the stakeholders in one discussion, including teachers, parents, and community leaders. The community needs to provide support to our youth programs through not just finances but by taking an actual leadership role and being involved. School Resource Officers are a great and positive opportunity to teach youth that law enforcement is there to assist and support the community. The SRO program should be expanded, particularly at the elementary and middle school level while children are still forming opinions. However, it is also critical to open up a dialogue with high school children, who have greater contact with society and may need answers. Continuing to have open dialogue and talking through issues is the best way to move forward, meet our goals, and generate creative ideas. Follow-through is critical to accomplishment. We should target afterschool clubs and lunch periods for education and interaction among the youth and emergency services. Law enforcement should increase its presence as teachers and leaders at community events. We should identify communities that are more efficient and effective at meeting their goals and utilize their programs as our foundation. We have to remember that we are creating our community for the next generation, and their input and dreams should be a focus to get them excited about the future of Yuma.



**FOUNDATIONAL FORUM FIVE – September 10, 2021**

**“Community Design—Parks and Recreation”**

***The Impact of Community Design***

A vibrant, thriving community would include many different elements. The viewpoint of each stakeholder group impacts the hierarchy of importance of each element within that segment. For example, the youth may choose broadband as the most important element of community design, whereas business stakeholders may choose access to water or stable power. Collaborative effort is key to developing all these elements. We must together decide what is “steak” to our community and what is “sizzle”; which of these design elements are foundation components (i.e., broadband, infrastructure) and which go on top of that to draw people here with a flair.

Certainly, there is concern about the level of water supply remaining sustainable. Water, in particular, is crucial for our community: we are “river people.” Without water, there is no community. Some communities are utilizing wastewater plants to help supplement and sustain community water resources. Yuma has ground water supplies that could be further utilized.

Also certainly, broadband access is critical. There are areas in Yuma County where broadband is inconsistent, and this causes frustration with residents and stymies growth.

But on top of these foundation elements, a vibrant Parks and Recreation effort adds to overall health for community residents and long-term benefits. This area plays a huge role in providing opportunities for families and youth to be outside. The PAC softball fields add to our community in many ways for local residents and visiting teams. Free outdoor recreational areas that are easily accessible to residents are desired and appreciated. Parks and recreation should invest in more staff to help connect the other parts we have talked about in previous discussions: housing, lower income, older population with social needs. By creating programs with non-profits, other government agencies, nursing homes, preschools, colleges, we can help our community.

We must also directly engage with the historic components of Yuma. This is expressly connected to our Old Town community and the riverfront, and these are key sites for focus and development. This expands the identity of Yuma in a way that “sizzles,” like Tombstone in Southern Arizona/Tucson. This development can balance the twin aspects of local community use and engagement alongside an expansion of Yuma as a tourist destination. The use of the spaces can range from outdoor hobbies (birding, activities in/on/around the water, etc.) as well as a constant and considered arts opportunity. Together, this combines the twin goals of (local) recreation and tourism as allied rather than distinct efforts. Moreover, this was posited to be developed with a key eye toward youth so that those who are here can have pride and enjoyment of their town while also being beneficial and attractive for their return if they go away for opportunities like college, thereby drawing them back to Yuma. Altogether, these proposals and ideas (the expansion of the arts, the further redevelopment of Old Town and the river areas, better infrastructure for connecting to the sites such as the Territorial Prison that facilitates both vehicular and foot traffic)

demonstrate how the city could work to better strengthen its ability to market itself both locally and beyond. Indeed, we could even utilize the allure of a National Heritage Area and National Historic Landmark, as it is a big deal. That is why we are here, to tell the Yuma story and of how the Colorado River drew people to its shores.

### ***Collaboration Between Sectors: Infrastructure and Recreation***

Good community design requires collaboration between the community and utilities. Planning for the future needs input from interested stakeholders. As the population grows, the community system needs to be upgraded. We are “on the path of all of the above,” as in, the community is moving in this direction, but lacking in some physical infrastructure.

To move in the right direction, there should be a clearer connection between development and the future industries and employment opportunities of Yuma. The lack of industry-ready development (especially in terms of spaces and buildings) currently limits expansion. Thus, collaboration with industry for current and future needs so that Yuma is ready is vital. There are a wide variety of stakeholders both in the city and the broader region. Currently, they are all operating somewhat autonomously, so facilitating a more formal sit down between these constituencies so that the various plans, intentions, needs, and wants can be shared and addressed, can enable working together so these goals and efforts are complementary. Collaborative effort will also reduce possible conflicts in the short-term and long-term plans when the individual entities have possible ideas for similar places. There need to be incentives to support collaboration to maximize the benefits to our community. Collaboration can lead to cost savings. This has occurred with utility companies and cities.

Throughout this, a focus on infrastructure is important, with key attention paid to roads, rails, etc., so that access to the various places is enabled (whether it is so businesses/industries can operate or for people to access our sites and new hotel developments). Similarly, other elements like strong internet, especially broadband, are important and beneficial so that Yuma is able to keep up with other communities. This forms both locals and businesses gaining stronger engagement with, and access to, a broader array of resources. It is important to invest into stable, employment opportunities within the city itself (with formal ties to the county more broadly), including expanding various part-time jobs into full-time positions, thereby offering more stability in the work being done as well as expanding the capacities of that work.

Similarly, it is vitally important for education to keep up with the workforce needs and articulate what these are. Collaboration is key. Through discussions with companies, education can design curriculum to meet workplace needs. These discussions have taken place in Yuma County throughout the levels of education and industry and have focused on how to train and retain an educated workforce.

Parks and recreation also are important for quality of life, especially for families. To keep families in Yuma County and retain them, accessible outdoor recreation activities are necessary. Lifestyle opportunities are also a reason for industry choosing Yuma County as a location.

### ***Accomplishing this Vision through Community Partners***

There are two key ideas around how the city can move forward and facilitate these ideas and opportunities. One is centered on a more formal engagement with the college and universities, highlighting interests in specific coursework and degree pathways that could be leveraged immediately on a local scale. Specific offerings in hotel/restaurant management, parks management, and recreation should be expanded. Alongside this, the 2% tax that is set to sunset in 2024 should be considered for extension. This tax represents millions of dollars for city and parks and recreation. Ideas around whether this needs to be reintroduced in a nearly identical form so that its time is extended, or possibly even working to increase the amount slightly, in line with other localities, thereby expanding the economic impact of the tax, should be considered.

It is important to work with various constituencies in and beyond the city so that this could be planned, with an emphasis on meetings with actionable goals for swifter implementation. A key example of the needs for this sort of coordination, cooperation, and communication is highlighted by the Avenue D extension conflicting with the plans for Rolle Field. By operating independently of each other without coordination, long-term plans can be put in jeopardy and the strongest possible routes for space utilization may be lost.

Community organizations, such as Visit Yuma, are essential for discussions on vibrant communities. Resident and tourist location draws, such as Telegraph Pass, would benefit from trees and facilities. The Bureau of Reclamation is an important stakeholder and collaborator since they have oversight over much land in the area. The military community has a significant presence in Yuma County and should be involved in discussions on community design. Active military look for activities and local areas would benefit as would the military personnel from local activities.

Incentives would help encourage collaboration. These could include tax incentives, a competition environment, reduction in regulations, and more. Each member of Yuma County needs to know how they, personally, will benefit from different elements of the community. People ask, "what can I gain from this?" In the end this helps in more ways than one, as even grant funding is more open to areas that demonstrate collaboration.

Yuma is a unique community where family is very important. Connecting with industry and partnering with education will enable our community to move forward successfully into the future. A cohesive community narrative will protect our mission of a vibrant community.

## **FOUNDATIONAL FORUM SIX – September 24, 2021**

### **“Underserved Communities”**

#### ***The Current State of Underserved Communities***

While we explored the underrepresented communities of African Americans, Latina females, LGBTQ, farmworkers and the disabled, other important underrepresented communities in Yuma include the Native American community, Veterans and elderly communities, youth, incarcerated persons, substance abusers and those at risk for suicide. Others include those with mental health issues (including veterans with PTSD), the homeless population, migrant families, Hispanic males/Latinos, and Asian/Pacific Islander and Middle Eastern populations.

Yuma lacks resources and services needed to support these communities, which are part of the backbone of our community. Sometimes programs don't offer complete solutions and are thus not helpful. For example, vouchers for housing cannot be used because of high rental prices or even lack of available housing. Mental health and other challenges need to be addressed by our entire community. By meeting these needs, our community will become more attractive. Providing training and opportunities for these communities is necessary to incorporate them into our community. It is important that we learn about the symptoms and signs of challenges for these underserved communities, so that we can better respond. Providing proper educational facilities and opportunities is one way to make sure that such needs are met.

#### ***The Vision of a Supported Underserved Population***

In an ideal world, our community would be understanding and supportive, and everyone would have equal access to the benefits of a vibrant community. In some cases, misperceptions caused by lack of understanding will lead to continuing challenges. Education is a two-way street. In order to provide the support needed we must assure that everyone is able to recognize groups that are underrepresented and have challenges that need to be addressed.

We should strive to realize that we are all humans and have different needs. Rather than reacting negatively to different people, we should act with support and work to remove barriers. Social and conventional media could be used by municipalities and support groups to reach out to the underserved with information about support services. Awareness that underserved communities are made up of individuals with individual needs will allow us to tailor our support as needed. If people would use their personal responsibility to respect and honor individuality, we could take care of everyone as a whole.

To be a vibrant community, we envision the best support and equitable opportunities to include:

- Diversity on local boards, committees, and organizational leadership. This ensures a platform for all voices, including those from underserved communities, to be heard and represented.

- Coordinating town halls and open conversation such as this at local schools.
- Participation from underserved populations with local non-profits and civic organizations. There should be more awareness and outreach by these organizations to underserved communities.
- Respecting other opinions and perspectives. Online culture has made it more acceptable to be disrespectful and 'ugly.'
- Engaging with influencers from underserved communities. Get them actively involved so they can encourage others.
- Providing opportunities in all areas of our county, not just the 'Cities'. Wellton has unique needs and issues.
- Continuing to just do what we're doing. Labor of Love is a great example, it is a program that shows appreciation for our local farmworkers. San Luis does a great job of showing appreciation of our farmworkers through events like Dia de la Campesina.
- Starting the conversation at home. We need to work with parents to ensure they are offering an open space at home to engage in open and caring conversation.
- Creating spaces/opportunities for underserved communities to come together, such as Dream Big where youth and senior centers are combined. Seniors love to share their experiences and knowledge with our youth.

### ***Accomplishing this Vision via Collaboration***

We have very powerful personal stories and experiences within our populace and these minds and voices need to get more exposure in our community. Simulations are a good way of helping people to understand their internal biases and what other communities face. School counselors can help shine a light on what realities are faced by the youth in these communities, helping the community at large to understand the challenges faced by others. To accomplish this vision, we need to work together and think of the greater region. Thinking regionally ensures opportunities are equally shared.

People in the underserved communities need to be able to take active leadership roles, but they often do not have role models to make them want to do it. All elements of our community need to be engaged. Students and even adults are not aware of where they can volunteer, so more effort at outreach to these communities is critical to their engagement. Community events should strive to make space available for support organizations to be present. Employers and the business community can play a major role in implementing needed changes by empowering individual employees to take action. We also need to better inform elected leaders so that they can do a better job of making the wider community aware of the needs of underserved communities. Municipalities constantly have openings on boards and commissions, which would be a good place to provide a voice and representation for the underserved. They also have leadership programs that could better reach out to underserved communities for participation. Business organizations should take an active role in educating their members about the importance of supporting underserved communities, and intentionally include diverse membership on their boards





and other leadership roles. Non-profits always need volunteers, but if they do not actively reach out to diverse people, they may not get involved. Programs like the Heart of Yuma are important ways to provide inspiration about the reasons to volunteer, and they hopefully appeal to people who would not otherwise be motivated to do so. Community events that spread the word about volunteer and leadership opportunities may go a long way to helping people get involved and represent their communities. Bottom line is, we all need to be not just accepting of people who are different than us, but we need to actively reach out to such individuals and encourage their inclusion and participation in our community.

It is our job as a community to listen and make an effort to understand all perspectives. To accomplish this, the following groups must be included in the collaboration:

- Private and public sector organizations. They can support community outreach and help fund needed programs.
- Civic groups. They are essential to organizing people and events.
- Volunteers. We have so many community members who are willing to help when needed.
- First generation residents. Their perspective is much different than those who have assimilated into American culture, and it is often overlooked.
- Military. They are a vital part of our community and can support.
- Joint venture partnerships with larger entities. They can help financially or provide needed services.

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