

Livability Summit Follow Up, Op Ed  
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**By Diane Brossart, President, Valley Forward Association**

Nearly 28 million domestic, overnight visitors came to play in Arizona last year. And more people than ever before came to stay. The latest U.S. Census Bureau figures released in late June tell us that Phoenix is attracting more than 2,000 new residents a month, more than any other city in the nation. The 29,826 new residents who recently moved in gave Phoenix the nation's biggest population increase in terms of raw numbers. Gilbert and Chandler alone each attract 1,000 new residents monthly. Every Valley city is growing extraordinarily.

How will all of those new people, and homes, and cars change this place? How will we keep the air clean, the faucets running, and people moving? Will we have enough parks? Can we keep the open space that we love? What will we need to do to keep ourselves and our kids healthy, and happy? How do we keep this Valley as livable as we want it to be?

These are some of the questions that Valley Forward Association tackles regularly and most intently at its recent and annual Livability Summit at Phoenix Civic Plaza. Key speakers included national experts Amory Lovins and Neal Peirce. The Morrison Institutes Rob Melnick moderated panels that included Neil Giuliano, Rita Maguire and Luther Probst. The stars of the show however were the attendees -- citizens who at the end of the day gave tangible recommendations to our policy makers/elected officials, business leaders, and all of us who live here. In light of recent stories about growth in our region, their comments are more meaningful and relevant now than ever.

Government officials were told to create a framework for community dialogue and actively engage citizens in that dialogue, to create public/private partnerships where possible, and to educate people on the consequences of lifestyle choices. Officials were also chided for failing to show political courage, and understanding and setting the true cost of water and resources. They were encouraged to be more flexible in planning and regulating, urged to stop subsidizing sprawl and to revise building codes for current technology, and to truly plan regionally.

Business leaders were reminded that the limits to future profits are ecological, not manmade and that efficiency in business practices is cheaper than fuel. Business leaders were also strongly encouraged to become champions and to conduct business *as if* nature and people were properly valued. Both the public and private sectors were asked to create and respond to economic incentives for environmentally-sensitive development. The audience emphatically insisted that solar energy happen here.

And for the rest of us who either contribute to the problems or the solutions, we must understand the consequences of our lifestyle choices and look for new and better ways to live in balance. The public – citizens like you and me – need to get involved in the issues, government actions and dialogue. We must support, promote and practice green building and use consumer demand to promote conservation.

Growth in the Valley isn't the issue – it's *how* we grow. What kind of a livable community do we want to leave our kids and their kids? Think about it. And then take action.