

Know-it-alls now know Morrison a gem

The very first week after moving into our new house in 1998, a flier was placed on the front door announcing a neighborhood meeting at a local public school to make residents aware of the pending zoning action on the farmland adjacent to our subdivision. Though I do not remember specifics about what was on the flier, the words were sufficient to make me and more than 200 other residents show up at the meeting the next week.

When I arrived at the evening meeting, the room was full of concerned residents and the group was quickly moved to a larger room down the hall. The apparent organizer started the meeting with personal biographical information that in my mind gave some credence to the affair. The opening remarks for the meeting listed planned speakers, which included a doctor to speak on health effects of the proposed zoning change. I thought this is exactly what I came for — to gather pertinent and authoritative information to evaluate what, if anything, I should do next. I was ready, notebook on my lap and pencil in my hand, to learn what was going on near my new house.

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Morrison farm that would become Morrison Ranch, the beautiful, unique, master-planned jewel in eastern Gilbert. The area covers about 3,000 acres and in my view will have no equal anywhere in the area — it certainly doesn't today with only a few hundred acres developed.

That meeting turned out to be just a bunch of malarkey, but I didn't know it at the time. Apparently well-intentioned people talked about issues they had no real knowledge of and brought up "issues" that "everyone should be aware of." I was caught hook, line and sinker. The meeting organizers said the next step in the process was the upcoming Planning and Zoning hearing in another week and everyone should go and voice their disapproval.

You've probably guessed correctly — I was at the Plan-

ning and Zoning meeting a week later and was one of more than a dozen people who made comments about the development — mostly negative. The only bright spot for me in this story was that I merely said the town needed more information on the proposed development. That wasn't really negative — was it?

The only positive result of that meeting for me was I took advantage of Scott Morrison's offer to meet with anyone individually to discuss their concerns. We met at the Morrison Ranch office the following week and in a little more than an hour I learned the project exceeded the requirements for open space, would bring in fewer residents than allowed in the General Plan (i.e. less density), and would be a unique development in the area that was not from the same cookie-cutter mold we were used to

seeing. When I left that meeting, I knew essentially none of the "issues" brought up by other residents were valid, and that most were not true. My tail was definitely between my legs as I went out that door.

It is now seven years later and Phase 1 of the Morrison Ranch development is completed and Phase 2 is well under way. This phase includes a few hundred acres directly east of the main exit from my neighborhood. I bet almost everyone feels it is a shame to see the farmland across the street become a subdivision. I have enjoyed seeing those acres plowed, planted, irrigated and harvested numerous times over the years. But if change must come, and it does, the extension of Morrison Ranch will be an asset to the community.

The Morrison family had a unique vision of how to convert from a farming operation to possibly the best-designed and executed development in the West. I am convinced we will be reading about their results in professional journals in the future. You may want to take a look at their plans and progress at www.morrisonranch.com.

Paul Hollar is a stakeholder in Gilbert. The views expressed are those of the author.