

City of Eloy surrounding Arizona City
By Lindsey Gemme, Staff Writer
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Town's annexations will insulate defiantly unincorporated community and could hurt efforts by some residents who seek its autonomy

ELOY - The city continues to expand its horizons, and landmass, with the addition of more than 15 square miles.

The City Council last week approved an annexation process for 6,051 acres known as Sunland Ranch, owned by Walton International.

This comes on the heels of an approved pre-annexation agreement for 3,800 acres of state land just south of Arizona City known as Sawtooth Village in December, despite rigorous opposition.

The recent annexation agreement came at the behest of Walton International, which owns about 9,635 acres just to the south and west of the state land plot. The development company wants its land to be annexed into Eloy along with the Sawtooth land this month. Sawtooth and Walton's two properties, Sunland Ranch A and Sunland Ranch B, have the potential for the development of 30,000 homes and a population count of 75,000.

"It will unquestionably be a significant growth area for the city of Eloy," City Manager Joseph Blanton said.

But voices of dissent were heard early on in 2008 about the annexation of either of the properties from residents of Arizona City - a 5-square-mile community growing on unincorporated county land just north of the area in question. For years, a group of residents has been trying unsuccessfully to pass a proposition of incorporation for Arizona City. In 2005, the group tried once more and included part of the Walton lands within the proposed boundary - something that almost came to a lawsuit had the proposition passed.

Despite Walton's express wish to be excluded from any Arizona City incorporation endeavors, the group had maintained hope that it could gain that area's growth and help generate funds for a new city. The group looked forward to future impact fees from the development to infuse the city, as well as revenue from building and planning and zoning fees.

Eloy's annexing of the lands would practically make Arizona City into a "county island," preventing it from growing as a municipality. The incorporation group has opposed becoming part of Eloy.

Carolyn Oberholtzer of the Rose Law Group, the firm representing Walton International, said in a letter to the state land commissioner, "Through annexation into Eloy, one of the largest benefits to the State Land Department [and Walton] is availability of water, sewer and fire services ... even if there was a way to obtain a similar development agreement with Arizona City, as a new city, it would lack services and resources necessary for the development."

The recent annexation agreement also includes any future contiguous, bordering lands Walton would purchase.