***There’s a lot going on in Pima County!***

There’s a lot going on in Pima County and it all has to do with expansion regardless of its impact on our community and environment. Project Blue’s 290-acre data center, City of Benson’s 200+ acre aluminum plant, Santa Rita Mountains 26 sq mile open pit mine, Linda Vista 52’s fifty-plus acre annexing, the 410-acre private airfield expansion in Marana, and the threat of opening Ironwood National Forest land to copper mining interests are just a few.

Despite community opposition over the impact of these projects on our living enjoyment and environment, elected officials and developers move ahead with their plans, often quietly, hoping that no one will notice. And sometimes making procedural changes without regard to proper process to achieve their agendas as suggested by angry citizens at a recent Benson City Council meeting when challenged about details of the aluminum plant construction.

Many of our elected leaders feel they need only shout jobs and revenue to justify their efforts. Even if the long-term outcome of these projects often cannot guarantee continuance of those jobs and revenue, but will permanently contaminate air, water, and our environment for generations. Where's the balance?

This edition of our newsletter outlines several issues that have popped up over the last few weeks. Project Blue’s 290-acre data center and the City of Benson’s 200+ acre aluminum plant. To do them justice, we are providing more details than some of our past articles. We want this information out there, so that our members will know what’s going on and can act if they are moved to do so. We will continue to monitor all of the projects mentioned above and keep our members updated in future newsletters.

You can support our neighbors and their fight for justice throughout Pima County by writing letters to state, county, city, and town officials, and attending meetings whenever possible. Ask our leaders to be thoughtful in their approach to growth and to consider all inhabitants of our county over the long term! Short-term gain often results in long-term pain.

***"Project Blue" heads to Tucson City Council***

**3.6 billion data center slated for construction southeast of Tucson**

Pima County recently voted the sale and rezoning of land needed to support Project Blue, a $3.6 billion data center, on a 290-acre campus, slated for construction southeast of Tucson. However, for the project to begin, the City of Tucson must annex the land into city limits so that the Tucson Water utility can provide water. That means the Mayor & City Council must approve the plan as well, and the ball is now in their court.

This controversial plan to build a large campus of data centers (a total of three county wide) for an undisclosed big tech company raises many red flags. For one, **why is the “big tech company” undisclosed**? Secondly, **the Project Blue team has not revealed how much water or electricity will be used**. When asked for additional details and specific information, elected officials can’t get good answers, and they are bound by non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) by sharing much of what little they do know.

District Two Pima County Supervisor Matt Heinz supports the sale stating “The fact that we can find a public-private partnership like this to help us out is a really good thing. It’s a win-win, I think, for southern Arizona.”

However, the Tucson Mayor and many members of the council are not convinced and are still gathering public input.

Ward Two Tucson City Council member Paul Cunningham submitted this statement: “Right now, the perceived shroud of secrecy that has accompanied Project Blue has made it very difficult to support. We have no specifics when it comes to water usage, energy use, and sustainability. Furthermore, a track record of buyer’s remorse has emerged from other communities who have built projects similar to this. These issues unresolved make me very skeptical. If we voted today; I’d vote no.”

*Note:* *Ward 3 Council Member - Kevin Dahl has also publicly come out as a “****Hard No****.”*

Living Desert Alliance does not support this project as presented and will work with local environmental organizations, elected officials and the public in demanding to know specific information and measurable outcomes before offering our support.

***Below are several links to learn more about this controversial project.***

[**Click here**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DI0MrKTuXamFD1LSo1pnduVe2EEjSSb11vUFB1R6TJ8/edit?tab=t.0) for an in-depth analysis presented by Scott Krooksmer, Executive Committee Representative of LD17. Very informative.

[**Click here**](https://mailchi.mp/09565c279adb/project-blue-data-center-9899998?e=c7f7e04a69) to review information from [**Tucson Mountains Association**](https://www.tucsonmountainsassoc.org/about.html). It includes an [**interactive dashboard**](https://www.skyislandai.com/project-blue) that allows you to explore different water and electrical use projections, as well as recent revelation about the project. It also includes [**contacts to elected officials**](https://files.constantcontact.com/edc91876901/733ec651-fa5c-4950-b15e-d5330ce2ed05.docx) so you can write to the Mayor and each member of the City Council individually with your thoughts.

[**Click here**](https://www.sonorandesert.org/2025/07/08/project-blue/)to review “*Project Blue: the facts and our concerns****.***” Submitted by the [**Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection**](https://www.sonorandesert.org/2025/07/08/project-blue/). A fact-based document outlining their concerns.

***Project Blue Community Information Meeting***

**Wednesday, July 23rd,**

**5–7pm**

[**Mica Mountain High School 10800 E. Valencia Rd.**](https://www.google.com/maps/place/Mica%2BMountain%2BHigh%2BSchool/%4032.1169784%2C-110.7649856%2C840m/data%3D%213m2%211e3%214b1%214m6%213m5%211s0x86d661148fa11ed7%3A0xf478a465a17d2a54%218m2%213d32.1169739%214d-110.7624053%2116s/g/11jcsxhz7z?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MDcwOS4wIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)

**Meeting will be live streamed for viewing at** [**www.youtube/@cityoftucson**](http://www.youtube/%40cityoftucson)

**City Council study session**

**Wednesday August 6th at City Hall downtown.**

**Time: TBA a week before the meeting.**

Mayor & Council Chambers

[**City Hall, 1st floor**](https://www.google.com/maps/place/255%2BW%2BAlameda%2BSt%2C%2BTucson%2C%2BAZ%2B85701/%4032.222205%2C-110.9747729%2C160m/data%3D%213m1%211e3%214m6%213m5%211s0x86d6712001622643%3A0x8d4f3ce8c0af8ba8%218m2%213d32.2226094%214d-110.9745539%2116s/g/11bw3wspjd?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MDcwOS4wIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)

[**255 W. Alameda**](https://www.google.com/maps/place/255%2BW%2BAlameda%2BSt%2C%2BTucson%2C%2BAZ%2B85701/%4032.222205%2C-110.9747729%2C160m/data%3D%213m1%211e3%214m6%213m5%211s0x86d6712001622643%3A0x8d4f3ce8c0af8ba8%218m2%213d32.2226094%214d-110.9745539%2116s/g/11bw3wspjd?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MDcwOS4wIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)

﻿

***The more people in the audience for these meetings, the better.***

***We need the Mayor & Council need to see how many people***

***oppose this plan.***

***We will follow up with the exact time when it's announced.***

***Incoming Aluminum Plant Fires up Benson Community.***

**Demand from community to stop the project grows**

[**﻿**](https://www.kgun9.com/joel-foster)Environmental concerns dominated last week’s July 7th [**Benson Planning and Zoning**](https://www.bensonaz.gov/departments/planning_and_zoning/planning_and_zoning_functions.php) [**Committee meeting**](https://webgen1files1.revize.com/cityofbensonaz/7-7-2025%20Action%20Minutes.pdf), where residents packed the room to contest zoning changes and past approvals for industrial development.

A key item involved rezoning a 5.99-acre parcel from light to heavy industrial use for Engineered Concepts, a metal fabrication business.

While city staff highlighted compatibility and economic benefits, residents expressed concerns over potential health issues, water and electricity usage and proximity to Lions Park.

The +200-acre, 170,000sf industrial building plant is planned for AZ Highway 80 across from 7th street in Benson and extends to the San Pedro River.

The 24/7 plant projected to process 300,000 tons of aluminum annually. Aluminum production has significant environmental impacts, primarily due to the energy-intensive processes involved in mining bauxite and refining it into aluminum, which contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, mining can lead to habitat destruction, water pollution from runoff, risk of human contamination, air pollution, loud industrial traffic, and noise.

To get an idea of how the plant could impact the area and a community, [**watch this video.**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jc1s3Rxtjw)

**This is no joke folks! It must be stopped.**

[**Click here**](https://nobensonaluminumplant.org/) to learn how the citizens of Benson are rallying to overturn this project.

[**Click here**](https://www.change.org/p/save-our-health-our-river-from-industrial-harm-in-benson-az?utm_medium=custom_url&utm_source=share_petition&recruited_by_id=53b7dca0-e4b7-11ed-8eb1-f587d2a52bf1) to sign a petition to *SAVE Our Health & Our River from Industrial Harm in Benson, AZ*.

***Public Meeting Scheduled***

An AZ Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) informational meeting is scheduled for **Monday July 28 6-9pm**at the Benson School District cafeteria/ community room located at [**360 S. Patagonia Street, Benson**](https://www.google.com/maps/search/360%2BS.%2BPatagonia%2BStreet%2C%2BBenson/%4031.960948%2C-110.3012813%2C1682m/data%3D%213m2%211e3%214b1?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MDcwOS4wIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D).

ADEQ Air and Water staff who will answer your questions in real time.

**Please attend, ask questions, and express your concerns.**

**Support our neighbors and friends in Benson!**

***MEETING REMINDER***

***Linda Vista 52 Annexation***

***﻿August 6th!***

**Marana Town Council**

**Wednesday, August 6th.**

**5:45PM (start time 6pm)**

[**Ed Honea Marana Municipal Complex 11555 W Civic Center Dr. Marana**](https://www.google.com/maps/place/Ed%2BHonea%2BMarana%2BMunicipal%2BComplex/%4032.4480461%2C-111.2131779%2C837m/data%3D%213m2%211e3%214b1%214m6%213m5%211s0x86d5e48cf0ada59b%3A0x1c598c4d5619a222%218m2%213d32.4480416%214d-111.2105976%2116s/g/11cmydmj9s?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MDYxNy4wIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D)

At this meeting, unless something changes in the interim, the council will vote to accept or reject the *Linda Vista 52 Annexation Plan,* which includes the re-zoning and development of over 50 acres of land to include:

* 13 three-story apartment buildings (306 units)
* 142 single- and two-story houses as noted in the above photo.

We encourage all members to attend this meeting to voice your concerns and offer alternative suggestions about this project.

Don't want to speak? No need to! Just showing up sends a clear message to the council that the community does not support the plan as it is currently presented.

***Learn more by clicking below:***

[**\*\*\* Alert \*\*\* Linda Vista 52 Annexation \*\*\***](https://myemail.constantcontact.com/----Alert-----Linda-Vista-52-Annexation-----.html?soid=1139902880990&aid=rtNJ_M7hZzk)

***Communities working together can make a difference!***

**We'll keep you posted**

Hearld Review Benson, AZ: Excerpt

BENSON — The hottest ticket in town on Monday night was the Benson Planning and Zoning committee meeting, where a packed house of residents awaited to hear details on the two major items on the agenda, a zoning change request and the approval of prior meeting minutes.

The public hearing for the rezoning of parcel 123-20- 016E from light industrial (I-1) to heavy industrial (I-2) for metal fabrication by Engineered Concepts was the main event. The parcel, 5.99 acres, is currently vacant commercial land. The rezoning process includes citizen review, a Planning and Zoning Commission public hearing, and a final council hearing on August 11, 2025.

The company fabricates and manufactures various metal products for municipal, state, and federal customers. The rezoning is necessary to comply with the city's zoning regulations for metal fabricators.

Favorable factors include job creation and industrial zoning needs but concerns were raised about the proximity to Lions Park and potential water consumption issues.

“There are fairly big lots that separate the Lions Park expansion, and then this parcel is surrounded, like we pointed out earlier, it's already surrounded by light industrial so a heavy industrial rezoning kind of fits in and shouldn't cause too much of an issue.” Abbie Johnson, Engineering Aide/Permit Technician, said.

Mary Lopez spoke out against the zoning change.

“I just want to say that, I just want to say that I'm not against the company. I'm against changing to a heavy industry," Lopez said. "If he comes in someone else might want to also. Could he just be given a conditional permit or something? I don't know what it takes, because I'm not against them,” Lopez said.

Discussion turned to possible action on the Consent Agenda, which included minutes of the May 5, Regular Meeting and minutes of the June 16 Regular Meeting, and amended minutes of the November 6, 2024, Regular Meeting.

It was the amendment to the November 6 meeting minutes that had concerned enough Benson residents to pack the meeting.

In November, the commission fielded an application for a conditional use permit regarding the height of a proposed building by Aluminum Dynamics, Inc. (ADI), a business intending to develop a recycling plant on the east side of town.

The proposed recycling plant has become a grave concern to hundreds of residents near the site, who fear that the potential of pollutants and environmental threats would be posed by the new business.

Besides air pollution and the impact on the San Pedro River’s ecosystem, residents worry the business will be consuming vast amounts of water.

There were several instances of people being out of order. The committee chair, Bill Mehrer, specifically warned attendees about clapping, giggling, and disruptive behavior, stating: "I have officers here. If you want to keep this up, we'll have you removed from the building. We need to stay in order for this entire meeting."

There were also some heated exchanges and interruptions during public comments that the chair tried to manage.

The audience shouted at the committee, asking that they separate the November minutes from the Consent Agenda before voting on it. Consent agendas are voted upon as a group of items, and no discussions are held. The council or committee will receive any details of the agenda before the meeting for consideration, but once at the meeting, the details are not up for discussion.

The move would have been allowed, but Mehrer appeared miffed at this point and voted the items through. “There is no public hearing on the main and this Consent Agenda,” Mehrer told the audience.

The committee discussed changing the quorum definition from "four or more members shall constitute a quorum" to a more flexible definition that would allow meetings to proceed with fewer members present.

Specifically, the city staff proposed changing the language to simply state that "a quorum shall be present," which would mean half or more of the commission members. This change was intended to help with attendance and allow provisions to happen more easily.

However, during the public hearing, some citizens like Crystal and Chris Broom spoke against reducing the quorum requirements, arguing that such a small number of people should not be making decisions for the city.

When the time for the “Call to the Public” portion of the meeting came, the committee heard from four speakers.

“I have just one question that I asked,” Dan Sprenkle said. “Why on November 6, were you in such a hurry like petulant children to approve a conditional permit to ADI, all you went off was what… Please don’t smirk at me.”

“I’m not smirking at you, and if you think I am, I can have you removed.” Mehrer shot back, pointing directly at Sprenkle.

“Put your finger down. You're not supposed to respond!” Someone shouted from the audience.

Sprenkle continued after the room quieted.

“Why did we not take the time to go do our own research about the plant? Why do we farm it out to a third party who had to a vested interest and get their input? And more importantly, why didn’t we go to the public, broad public, to get opinions about this?” Sprenkle asked. “And what really bothers me is the fact that this was snuck under the radar with seven people notified and attended in November."

Jacob Kartchner known for his long tenure with the Sheriff's Office and his recent run for County Supervisor, spoke next.

Jacob Kartchner reminded the comission, “Planning zoning needs to remember that they are first and foremost planners, and they need to really stick to that general development plan.”

“Planning and zoning needs to remember that they are first and foremost planners, and they need to really stick to that general development plan,” Kartchner began.

He spoke of “expendable resources such as water,” and the need to account for the amounts that a business like ADI would consume weighed against the promise of jobs.

Kristen Finnegan wasn’t done with the Consent agenda, insisting the November 2024 minutes could have been set aside. “I was wanting to request that this item be removed from the consent agenda and moved down for discussion this evening. I am opposed to these minutes being amended eight months after the fact,” she told the committee.

Finnegan referred to the planning and zoning Handbook by the Arizona Department of Commerce, page 28, under Consent and Action Items before a motion is made and a note is taken.

She reminded Mehrer of the procedure.

“The chair asks if any commissioner or member of the public would like any of the items removed from the consent agenda in order to hear discussion of the item. If no one objects, then a motion to approve the Consent Agenda is made and the vote taken. If any item is removed, it is put on the regular agenda, and the Commission can then move on to action items.”

Joseph Townsend, the president of Benson United, a nonprofit founded to advocate for the people of Benson and the surrounding community.

“I'm speaking tonight on behalf of myself, Benson United, and 85 other concerned citizens who have signed a written petition regarding the planning and zoning Commission's November 6, 2024, approval of a conditional use permit,” Townsend said.

“We believe that the public notice and agenda for that meeting were legally insufficient under Arizona law,” Townsend continued.

Kathleen Kitty Haynes warned that the proposed plant was in “disharmony with the land use parcel policies,” and suggested the Airport Industrial Park area may be better suited for an aluminum recycling plant.

Arizona Department of Environmental Quality ADEQ will hold an informal community meeting on July 28, at 6 p.m. at the Benson School District Cafeteria/Multi-Purpose Building, 360 S. Patagonia Street. ADEQ staff will explain the permitting process and the environmental protection that the ADI permit will deliver.

The meeting will also involve an informal question-and-answer session, although any comments provided at the informal community meeting are not considered formal public comment. It will present the next opportunity for groups to speak out against ADI’s project.