

Understanding the BNSF Development: What You Need to Know and How to Make Your Voice Heard

Residents in the area surrounding the proposed BNSF railway development are being encouraged to get involved and stay informed as a significant land use decision approaches.

The Background

BNSF Railway purchased approximately 800 acres of land in Wittmann, AZ, in 2004 with the intention of future development. Initial discussions began with the City of Surprise about annexation, but those talks were later abandoned. Since then, BNSF has acquired an additional 3500 acres and has been working with Maricopa County to advance the project.

Now, two critical planning and zoning steps are moving forward:

Step One: Comprehensive Plan

Scheduled for **August 20, 2025**, this vote by the **Maricopa County Board of Supervisors** involves approval of the **Comprehensive Plan for 800 acres**. This is a crucial first step and requires a **3/5 majority vote**. The plan lays the foundation for what type of development will be permitted—residential, commercial, industrial, or a mix.

Maricopa County Supervisors:

- **District 1 Supervisor Mark Stewart** District1@maricopa.gov
- **District 2 Supervisor Thomas Galvin** District2@maricopa.gov
- **District 3 Supervisor Kate Brophy McGee** District3@maricopa.gov
- **District 4 Supervisor Debbie Lesko** District4@maricopa.gov
- **District 5 Supervisor Steve Gallardo** District5@maricopa.gov

Step Two: Zoning for All 4,300 Acres

Following the Comprehensive Plan, the next stage will involve **zoning changes** for the entire BNSF property. This includes designations for **large warehouses and industrial uses**, a sharp contrast to the current zoning of **one house per acre**. As of now, it is uncertain if this zoning case will be included on the August agenda.

The Details You Should Know

- **Soft Zoning vs. Hard Zoning:**
Soft zoning refers to the County's general plan indicating the intended use for

areas—such as industrial or commercial—but without specific building designs. *Hard zoning* includes exact site plans, including structures that could be up to **90 feet tall** and cover **five acres or more**.

- **Federal Influence:**

Railroads fall under **federal regulations**, meaning BNSF has authority that can supersede local zoning rules. This could allow BNSF to construct an **Intermodal Facility** even if local officials reject warehouse plans.

- **Alternate Paths:**

If Maricopa County denies zoning or development, BNSF could re-approach the **City of Surprise** for annexation. Approval there could allow the project to continue under city jurisdiction.

- **Community Concerns:**

While some local institutions, such as **Nadaburg School**, have accepted donations (e.g., archery equipment from BNSF), they have not made formal statements about the proposed development. Meanwhile, groups like the **Arizona Chamber of Commerce** are reportedly seeking meetings with County Supervisors—likely to push for approval.

How to Get Involved

Former Congresswoman **Debbie Lesko** encourages residents to speak up:

1. **Put your comments in writing**—emails or letters must include **your name and address** to become part of the official public record.
2. **Send your opinions to your elected officials:**
 - **Rep. Beverly Pingerelli:** bpingerelli@azleg.gov
 - **Rep. David Livingston:** dlivingston@azleg.gov
 - **Sen. Frank Carroll:** fcarroll@azleg.gov

Every voice matters, especially on issues that impact land use, quality of life, and the environment. Whether you support or oppose the project, now is the time to engage and ensure your concerns are heard.