



SOLANGE WHITEHEAD MY TURN

# The Desert Discovery Center: Move it or lose it



Let's stop pretending. There is no public support for building Desert Discovery Center in our beautiful McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Voters do not want more buildings and less open space. And certainly, they do not want millions of their tax dollars wasted every year to keep the concrete loser afloat.

The notion that the Desert Discovery Center was always part of the plan and critical to tourism is a lot of hooey. The Gateway Trailhead accomplishes everything that the original DDC plan proposed. The preserve — in all its natural, undeveloped glory — has wildly exceeded everyone's expectations as a tourist attraction. Mission accomplished.

## Like TNT

The mayor gets it. In his State of the City speech, Mayor Jim Lane likened the DDC to TNT. Councilpersons Kathy Littlefield and Guy Phillips get it. Now we need the rest of City Council to get off this foolhardy path and start thinking big ideas ... not bad ideas.

Korte, Klapp, Smith and Millhaven, please take note: The city's own data confirm that citizens overwhelmingly oppose building the DDC in the preserve. There is threatened litigation against the city charging that the DDC violates Scottsdale's Preserve Ordinance and City Charter.

There is a valid legal question about the misappropriation of preserve tax dollars. The DDC was not part of any ballot or bond language approved by the voters. To top it off, the DDC is projected to lose over \$1 million every single year. Year after year. Already, the council is considering tax hikes to cover the current operating budget. Is it really a good idea to saddle your constituents with millions more in annual debt to prop up a DDC they overwhelmingly oppose?

There are two other far more sensible



ALEXIS MACKLIN/THE REPUBLIC

Scottsdale is looking into building a Desert Discovery Center at the Gateway Trailhead at the McDowell Sonoran Preserve.

paths for this City Council to consider: Pull the plug on this project or put it up for a public vote. Likely, the outcome will yield the same result.

## What about Taliesin?

There is, however, one additional option that can transform the DDC into a winner.

Take the DDC out of the preserve and place it neatly in Taliesin West. Taliesin is a world-renowned facility and a proven tourism generator that may benefit from expanded programming.

A DDC at Taliesin will have the same beautiful McDowell Sonoran Preserve backdrop with a substantially reduced price tag thanks to all the existing infrastructure.

At Taliesin, the DDC can develop unique desert-living programming that complements Taliesin, taps into an existing tourism base and operates in an area that is already fee-based. Suddenly, the DDC looks like less like TNT and more like a missing puzzle piece that makes our community whole.

*Solange Whitehead is a former Preserve Commission member who spends a lot of time outdoors with her family.*