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OUR VIEW

Missing an opportunity

After a recent presentation at a Sierra Vista Chamber event and numerous meetings with the Benson City Council, it's clear that plans for Villages at Vigneto are nearing the final stages of the approvals needed before construction can begin. Mike Reinbold, leading spokesman for the development, told those attending the Chamber breakfast last week that his company plans to start building homes next summer.

Over the next 20 years, Villages at Vigneto expects to construct 28,000 homes, four recreation centers and provide about 200,000 square feet for retail and commercial businesses. The Tuscan-themed project is set to add some 70,000 residents to the county's population and financial forecasts put its impact at \$24 billion over the life of the development.

It's not a surprise that it has taken years for El Dorado Benson, LLC — the developer — to move this project forward. The company has already made a significant investment in purchasing the property, drafting plans for the build-out and obtaining the approvals necessary before the first shovel of dirt can be moved.

Despite that investment and all the planning that has already been completed, the developer has been silent on any effort being made at the property to utilize today's technology for water conservation. This is a missed opportunity.

At previous public meetings, numerous residents have raised concerns that the development threatens to impact the San Pedro River and deplete local groundwater. No one seems to know for sure what the exact impact will be, but the silence of El Dorado Benson in responding to these concerns has contributed to an adversarial tone during public discussions of the project.

Reinbold said "detailed planning and engineering" will be completed for Villages at Vigneto during the next year, laying out the specifics on what is planned for the project. If the company is already planning to embrace water conservation practices — WaterSense building standards, recharge infrastructure and xeriscape design — it's missing an opportunity to promote that message by staying silent on the concerns voiced at public meetings.

If El Dorado isn't planning to employ any water conservation practices, the development isn't being a good neighbor, deserves criticism and is assured of continuing objections moving forward.

Ignoring public concerns about what, if any, steps are being taken to address water issues won't make the complaints go away. They will instead get louder and more frequent.