

“What If # 2”

In the last newsletter, the question was posed of “What If” in 1961 Roy Rogers and Dale Evans had followed through on their proposal of buying a large chunk of undeveloped Sun City land. Their proposal was to develop a Western theme park they hoped to call “Frontierland.” Today, let us look back to 1965 to another failed proposal with potential to disrupt active retirement with potential impact far beyond Sun City.

A bit of background: In March 1965, The Atomic Energy Commission (A.E.C.) was given approval to construct a massive proton accelerator at an estimated cost of \$300,000,000 to be called the National Accelerator Laboratory. A site acquisition group within the A.E.C. was put together quickly and interest was considerable. Requirements were outlined as: 1.) A minimum of 3,000 acres of development land, [Sun City north of Grand Ave.] 2. Access to a major airport, [Sky Harbor] 3. A network of highways connecting the site to other parts of the country, and 4. A major university that granted graduate degrees in engineering and sciences [A.S.U.]. Over 120 proposals were submitted from 46 states.

From the notes of Del Webb Development Company President John Meeker, we learned that a proposal submitted by the company was named a finalist after inspection by an A.E.C. site evaluation team. In December 1965, a spokesman for the A.E.C. divulged their decision was to acquire 6,800 acres in Illinois—not far from both O’Hare and the University of Chicago. The project took close to five years to build and now employs close to 2,000 scientists and engineers. Its estimated economic impact to the surrounding area is over \$500,000,000 annually.

We can only speculate what would have happened if Sun City was the chosen site. The size of the land purchase in Illinois suggests Sun City would never have crossed Grand Avenue, as all the land in Phase 2 and Phase 3 would have been acquired by the A.E.C. Why did the Del Webb Development Company offer to sell the property? Would Sun City West have been built? Fortunately, we have answers for some of the questions as to the thinking of Del Webb Development Company officials in 1965. But that will have to wait for “What If #3.”

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