

El Mirage mayor supports Luke, wants solid financial footing

by Cecilia Chan - Sept. 15, 2009 11:44 AM, The Arizona Republic

El Mirage won't back down from its pursuit of economic development around Luke Air Force Base.

Despite the resignation of Mayor Fred Waterman Friday, it's pretty much status quo concerning the city's stance on Luke Air Force base.

Waterman stepped down after five years in office to deflect criticism of El Mirage and allow it to move forward.

Interim Mayor Michele Kern reiterated support for the base but said El Mirage still will seek solutions to its economic future.

"We have a responsibility as a municipality to be sustainable," Kern, 49, a council member since 2002, told *The Republic*. "There's no way I could say my goal is un-sustainability."

In a written statement, Kern listed possible options that could secure the city's economy and protect the base's mission, namely "policy changes or statutory revisions that would allow for more fully diversified economies in the areas surrounding Luke AFB."

"I want to immediately clarify to our constituents the El Mirage leadership has no desire to close Luke Air Force Base," Kern wrote four days after she moved from vice mayor to top leader of the city.

The city's trip to Washington in March to seek help from land-use restrictions ignited a barrage of criticism from West Valley leaders, who said it threatens the base's chances of landing the F-35 joint strike fighter. The El Mirage entourage sought \$400 million in federal compensation. Kern, who did not go on the trip, said she has to review whether the city will still seek financial help, such as economic stimulus money.

The base, which pumps \$2.17 billion annually into the state's economy, needs the next generation of fighter jets to secure its future as the F-16s are phased out.

Although Waterman has stated that he won't support F-35s flying over El Mirage until he knows how loud they are, Kern said she is not ready to take a position.

"Obviously, I am committed to be open and looking for information," said Kern, a budget analyst for Phoenix. "Once we have the information we will share it with our residents and as a city we can go from there."

Kern indicated that El Mirage will ask municipalities such as Glendale, Goodyear and Surprise to share any information they might have on the F-35 and its impacts so the city can do its due diligence.

"It's time for inappropriate comments by all parties to end and a more constructive dialogue based on facts and collaboration to emerge," Kern said in her statement.

Kern also addressed West Valley mayors' criticism that Waterman failed to articulate El Mirage's needs, saying she is committed to do better. El Mirage officials have not yet determined how long Kern will serve as mayor.

Post a comment

Waterguytoo, Sep-15 @ 12:17 PM

Hopefully Ms. Kern will have the gumption to fire the pompous windbag that is really behind this mess....BJ Cornwall. Let's take his \$200,000 a year salary and get a true professional to run this City. I will be at the next Council Meeting to openly ask this question.

There is **1 reply** to this comment.

Mehecanindian, Sep-15 @ 1:28 PM

and his admin too.....

[LadyLinda](#), Sep-15 @ 1:45 PM

It seems to me that this is another example of biting the hand that feeds or FED you. Luke AFB is what put that area on the Map and now you want to restrict them; tell them what kinds of planes they can have flying on and off the base? Get real. If you don't like the sound of the jets, don't move there! And just because you're trying to attract more homes to the area doesn't mean that the city council should have ANY right to determine the operating procedures of the base AT ALL.

There are **2 replies** to this comment.

Gemini1001, Sep-15 @ 1:57 PM

Do you even think before you write? What is "another example?" Kern's letter says nothing about wanting to restrict what kinds of planes can fly from the base. And where has anyone in El Mirage ever said anything about attracting more homes to the area? Ms. Kern has made clear she intends to work cooperatively with all parties, including base officials, to reach a sustainable solution that will permit El Mirage and the base to co-exist.

There is **1 reply** to this comment.

[LadyLinda](#), Sep-15 @ 2:20 PM

Another example as in...it's typical that people move to a particular area because Military bases attract them there. The bases live comfortably as neighbors to these communities until expansion or noise or traffic makes the minority start to complain and put pressure on the bases to change their ways. Example: Box Elder, a small community that grew up outside the gates of Ellsworth AFB in South Dakota. This little town wouldn't even exist if it were not for the base and yet they have complained enough that the flight patterns and flight times of the base had to be changed to accommodate the few complainers. It is my opinion...and my opinion only...that this should not be allowed to happen. And yes, I do think before I write. Do you read thoroughly before you respond? The article clearly states that part of the problem here is Lukes attempts to bring the F-35's on base but there are already people squawking about the noise they might create. And what the heck do you think the term "economic development" means? They want to build, to expand, to lure in businesses and homes to produce income through taxes for the city. Because the base is there, there are land use restrictions. El Mirage is asking for those restrictions to be lifted and if not, they want the government to cough up \$400 Million in compensation. I argue that Luke AFB and the 2.7 BILLION that it is pumping into the local economy is enough and that it is ridiculous to not only encroach on the base but ask for more handouts if they can't. Keep it up, and Luke may be on the chopping block and where would El Mirage and all the surrounding communities be then?

Gemini1001, Sep-15 @ 2:56 PM

Economic development does not have to be development that is incompatible with Luke. Also, there are other alternatives that do not involve any development near Luke. I challenge you to show one occasion in all the discussion in the last seven months that any representative of El Mirage has said it wants to develop area near Luke with houses. Go and look, you find nothing ever said by someone from El Mirage. What you will find is all those outside El Mirage attributing false statements and motives to El Mirage, just as you have done in your response to the article. If Luke does end up closing, it will not be because of Elf Mirage, it will be because of all those who rushed to condemn El Mirage and have kept this issue in the press. That has not been El Mirage. While former Mayor Waterman may not have handled things properly, he never ran to the press to report on the content of his meetings with other west vally leaders. Whoever was responsible for those leaks is the real traitor to Luke and I can only presume that person(s) is

the one who actually wants Luke to close, but wants to make it seem that the fault is El Mirage's. The F-35 is going to be an issue because it has been reported by the Air Force, not by El Mirage, that it will be louder at 2,000 feet above the ground than the F-16 is at 300 feet above the ground. Think about that increased level of noise. If the F-35 is to come to Luke, what is wrong with letting all those who will be impacted, who are not now impacted by the F-16, know what to expect? Or, does our country no longer support a free and open discourse? Are we all limited to only one view? If that is the case, then what freedoms are being protected by the military?

Glister, Sep-15 @ 1:51 PM

"we have the responsibility to hold our breath, and stomp out feet even if we're wrong .."

There is **1 reply** to this comment.

Glister, Sep-15 @ 1:27 PM

wow i'm twenty minutes fast

[F35](#) Sep-15 @ 2:27 PM

Again, the Arizona Republic has misreported the facts. El Mirage is not only concerned about their economic development and it is understandable given the fact that it is easy for Peoria, Glendale and Surprise to criticize El Mirage when they are not giving up anything and El Mirage has to foot the cost of "saving Luke" if you live in El Mirage, you are paying too in the form of higher taxes to support fire, police, etc because your city cannot develop.

El Mirage's main concern, and I do not live in El Mirage, is about the extreme noise levels associated with the F-35. These noise levels are not only going to be unpleasant to listen to, they will pose real health threats to many west valley residents. I have a copy of the Environmental Impact Study which shows just how dangerous the F-35 will be in a metropolitan area. You can obtain a copy of this report by emailing acpprteam@yahoo.com.

You people who criticize your city officials for looking out for your health and safety need your heads examined. Your properties will soon be in the LDN's which are restricted from any permitting. No pools can be built, no repairs will be made to storm damage, no rebuilds of your home in case of fire. Think I'm wrong, check out the noise levels and then project the expansion of the restricted zones accordingly. Now, if you do not care about your properties which will soon become encumbered, without notice, then ask yourself about how much you are willing to sacrifice for the sound of freedom when that sound breaks your eardrums and causes neurological damage. There is not a person in El Mirage and several in Sun city, Surprise, Glendale and Peoria will soon find your homes encumbered by restrictions and your homes will be uninhabitable. Send for the EIS report. Then open your eyes to the fact that the F-35 is not the F-16 in terms of dangerous noise levels.

Wake up and then get down on the ground and thank your lucky stars for your city officials. I wish my city officials cared about our citizens in our area. They don't. The majority of the West Valley mayors are greedy and all they care about is the money that they will get from Martin Lockheed for supporting the agenda. Speaking of agenda. The Arizona Republic will never print the EIS study and they will never tell that bases that have experienced the f-35 are suing the air force over the dangers. See Valpariso Florida and Virginia Beach, Va. Google it and don't write another ignorant word until you see what is going on in these communities. After you google it you may realize that El Mirage may not be so crazy after all. See if the Republic prints the news about the law suits. They won't because they want to keep you in the dark until it is too late for your complaints to stop the f-35 in support of their corporate partners.

If you think that the "grass roots" El Mirage citizens are only defending Luke. Think again. They fall into one of two categories. One, they have a political agenda and hope to eliminate the competition and their subsequent rise to power. Two, they have a financial interest in the f-35 coming to Luke. They don't give a darn about the base or the valley, they care about their pocketbooks. You are being propagandized for someone else's benefit

By the way, when Ms. Mook began her meeting two weeks ago, she thanked the Republic for helping her to organize it. So much for the grass roots. Pelosi's astroturf comment may have been misapplied to the dissenters in this country, but it fits people like Mook and Kathy Franz. Look at their motivations, ask the Republic why they are not printing the truth about the noise levels of the F-35. Do some homework before you keep writing your ignorant comments

El Mirage will become uninhabitable if the f-35 comes to Luke. so will some areas in Surprise, Glendale, Peoria, Avondale, Lichtfield Park etc. Wake up and stop listening to the special agenda crowd of Mook, Franz and the Republic. And this is from someone who does not even live in El Mirage. "My people perish for a lack of knowledge"

Send for the report acpprteam@yahoo.com and then decide how you are going to save your financial future and your family's health.

Gemini1001, Sep-15 @ 2:41 PM

Ms. Chan:

You are a disgrace to journalism. You have chosen the low road in your reporting in order to sensationalize an issue. I have read Ms. Kern's letter to the El Mirage residents, and I wish you would have done the same before you falsely claimed that it is "pretty much status quo concerning the city's stance on Luke Air Force base." Ms. Kern states very clearly that she and her City are not looking to close or hurt Luke AFB (which unfortunately is exactly what you are doing by reporting to the contrary--your article will most likely be used by those in Idaho as proof that things at Luke have not changed, so the F-35 should go to Mountain Home--good job Ms. Chan).

Ms. Kern is extending an olive branch to try to reach an accord with federal, state and local leaders to address the adverse impact of Luke on El Mirage. That doesn't mean El Mirage wants to "kill" or "close" Luke, all it means is that it is looking for some recognition of the unique burden it bears having over two-thirds of its land development restricted, yet shares virtually none of the benefits of having the base so near. El Mirage and Luke are not mutually exclusive, but if you and others continue to frame the discussion in such a vane, I suppose those who will make the decision regarding Luke might agree with you; what if they decide the discourse is too volatile so it is easier to simply close Luke, then we all lose.

Ms. Kern does not say that she opposes the F-35. However, as I would hope she would do on behalf of her City, she is asking that all information regarding the F-35 be brought to light so all the residents of El Mirage can form their own well informed and knowledgeable opinion on the issue. The key piece of information on the F-35 so far comes from the Air Force's own study at Eglin AFB in Florida. According to the Air Force's study of the F-35, the noise of the F-35 at 2,000 feet above the ground will be louder than the noise of an F-16 only 300 feet above the ground. If this is accurate, and the Air Force itself is the source, this means thousands of people in Sun City, Surprise, Goodyear, El Mirage and Peoria, who currently have no objection to the jet noise over their homes, will be subjected to a new noise level over their homes as if they were on one-half mile from the end of the air strip while the current F-16 is landing at Luke. It is a shame that in a society where we trumpet a free press that all we get is a press that prefers to pander to fear mongering rather than to engage in insightful and thought provoking reporting so that informed and intelligent decisions can be made. I suspect your next article will simply remark on the physical attributes (or maybe perceived racial background) of the residents of El Mirage. It is a shame that the Arizona Republic, who recently chastised the City of Surprise for its perceived secrecy, refuses to even discuss the Eglin study in the press. What's wrong Ms. Chan and editors of the Republic, is the sunshine that might be shone on the F-35 too bright for you to handle? Shame on you.