



## SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

October 5, 2015

The Sustainability & Transportation Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on October 5, 2015 at 4:18 p.m.

### COMMITTEE PRESENT

Kevin Thompson, Chairman  
Alex Finter  
Dave Richins

### COMMITTEE ABSENT

None

### STAFF PRESENT

Kari Kent  
Margaret Robertson

(Chairman Thompson excused Committeemember Richins from the beginning of the meeting; he arrived at 4:38 p.m.)

#### 1. Items from citizens present.

There were no items from citizens present.

#### 2-a. Hear a presentation, discuss and provide a recommendation on the standards and guidelines for the continued implementation of the General Plan.

Planning Director John Wesley displayed a PowerPoint presentation (**See Attachment 1**) and reported that staff in the Development and Sustainability Department are continuing to explore the role of municipalities in helping to encourage transformation and growth. He explained that staff recognizes the importance of aligning the City's development practices (i.e., standards and guidelines) with the vision outlined in the Mesa 2040 General Plan, which includes elements such as transitioning from suburban development to more urban-type uses, a pedestrian-friendly environment and encouraging sustainable development.

Mr. Wesley referred to a diagram titled "What is a sustainable community" and highlighted a variety of components, including the environment, the economy and society as a whole. (See Page 4 of Attachment 1). He stated that in order for Mesa to become a sustainable community, it was important for the City to take a long-term approach and focus on the present as well as the future. He added that placemaking was a key element of a sustainable community. (See Page 5 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Wesley recounted that in 2014, Mesa voters approved the Mesa 2040 General Plan. He noted that the document outlines the City's vision for the future and identifies a series of elements including, but not limited to: creating a City of Choice(s); creating and maintaining a variety of great neighborhoods; growing and maintaining diverse and stable jobs; and providing rich, high quality public spaces.

Mr. Wesley also commented that staff utilizes different tools in their "toolbox" in an effort to implement the General Plan. He said that the City's budget and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) provide funding for various projects and/or developments and added that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars are also used to fund certain programs.

Mr. Wesley indicated that since 2003, the City has developed six sub-area plans, which will be discussed in greater detail later in the presentation. He noted that the plans focus on the needs of the respective areas and become more detailed over time.

Mr. Wesley briefly spoke with respect to the City's codes and ordinances (See Page 9 of Attachment 1), all of which predate the latest General Plan update. He pointed out that newer zoning tools include the Form-Based Code, which was adopted by the Council in conjunction with the Central Main Plan; and the development of planned communities, such as Eastmark and Cadence.

Mr. Wesley further reported that development standards, which are adopted ordinances, are often difficult to modify. He stated that such tools establish minimum standards (i.e., setbacks, building heights, and screening) and address design aesthetic issues, as well as certain health and safety matters. He displayed a document illustrating the development standards categories. (See Page 12 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Wesley remarked that although design guidelines are more flexible than development standards, they are more challenging to enforce and require "political will" to implement. He briefly reviewed a series of design guidelines that have been developed in Mesa. (See Page 14 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Wesley displayed a number of photographs illustrating examples of successful developments in Mesa, utilizing the City's current tools, as compared to more urban-type developments that have yet to be achieved due to a lack of appropriate development standards. (See Pages 15 and 16 respectively of Attachment 1)

Development and Sustainability Project Manager Angelica Guevara addressed the Committee and reported that one of the components of a sustainable community is ensuring that it is economically sustainable. She explained that such strategies include growing and maintaining diverse and stable jobs. She stated that the City endeavors to achieve such a goal by attracting a skilled and knowledgeable workforce and developing and maintaining economic activity areas.

Ms. Guevara commented that another element of sustainability that the City was addressing is ensuring that the community is socially sustainable. She noted that such efforts include the development of programs to assist successful neighborhoods, as well as those that are in need and require the City's assistance. (See Page 18 of Attachment 1) She pointed out that the General Plan contains strategies that would address reallocating certain CDBG dollars that are

focused on specific areas in the community. She explained that in the future, the goal would be to use the grant monies in order to fund programs throughout the community where there is a need, as opposed to concentrating on specific areas of the City.

Ms. Guevara, in addition, highlighted various programs that the City has implemented in an effort to ensure that Mesa is an environmentally sustainable community. (See Page 19 of Attachment 1) She cited, by way of example, that a Low Impact Development (LID) Toolkit was recently developed for the purpose of diverting stormwater runoff.

Ms. Guevara remarked that moving forward, staff will continue to work with developers. She acknowledged that many of the tools that staff uses are geared toward suburban development, which is not part of the vision outlined in the General Plan. She also stressed the importance of staff examining and updating such tools, including the sub-area plans, codes and ordinances, development standards and design guidelines.

Ms. Guevara offered a brief overview of a few of the City's successful developments, including Encore on First, a residential development; and Mulberry, a development which combines residential and commercial uses. (See Page 21 of Attachment 1)

Ms. Guevara further reported that it was also important for staff to explore how best to encourage sustainability in all areas of the community. She explained that although staff was working hard in this regard, they would continue to encourage developers to incorporate methods in their projects that are more sustainable. She also stated that further development of the City's sub-area plans was crucial so that staff could determine which building forms are appropriate and where; how to address solid waste pickup; provide for stormwater retention and emergency access; and when and where streets could be narrowed. She noted, in addition, that it was necessary for staff to update and review ordinance standards and guidelines in order to better utilize such tools and more effectively communicate with developers.

Ms. Guevara provided an extensive overview of the results of various sub-area plans. Her comments included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Lehi Sub-Area Plan – In response to the residents' concerns regarding certain livestock issues in the area, ordinances were adopted to address such matters.
- Citrus Sub-Area Plan – The City created standards for office corners, so that as office development occurred in the area, it met the desires of the community and preserved the existing citrus trees.
- Mesa Gateway Strategic Development Plan – The document prevented the development of housing where it did not belong and also allowed it where it was appropriate.
- Central Main Plan – The plan guided the development of light rail, encouraged urban development and helped to implement the Form-Based Code.

Ms. Guevara emphasized that in all of the above-referenced plans, additional ideas and elements are included that have yet to be implemented due to limited staffing and a lack of resources.

Ms. Guevara referenced a map titled “Additional Sub-Area Plans,” which illustrates the existing sub-areas, as well as possible sub-areas that could be explored in the future. (See Page 25 of Attachment 1)

In response to a question from Chairman Thompson, Ms. Guevara clarified that whenever staff develops sub-area plans or conducts General Plan updates, they reach out to the adjacent communities, the state and the county in an effort to solicit their comments and feedback.

Ms. Guevara continued with the presentation and highlighted the subdivision regulations that are utilized by staff, such as the Desert Uplands Development Standards, which staff intends to update in the near future. She noted that the street development standards and urban development standards could also be refined in order to focus on the City’s vision of greater urban development in the community. She further commented that in staff’s opinion, it would be helpful if the Design Guidelines/Inspiration booklets were more image driven. She stated that such tools would enable staff to more effectively communicate with developers as it relates to the higher quality development that the City was seeking.

Ms. Guevara, in addition, remarked that staff was working with Building Codes from 2006 and implemented the Energy Code from 2009, both of which are outdated. She explained that several years ago, staff began the process of updating the codes, but was unable to continue due to funding issues. She said that it would be beneficial to update the codes since the newer codes are more interactive and hyperlinked. She also noted that the updated codes would be compatible with the future system that the Development Services Department is currently working to implement, which would enable staff to work with electronic document submittals.

Development and Sustainability Project Manager Jeff McVay came forward and briefly discussed the City of Mesa’s award-winning LID Toolkit. He reported that the document was created in response to an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) mandate that directed entities that have stormwater permits to explore LID. He explained that LID is an approach to development that works with nature to manage stormwater as close to its source as possible. He stated that the document, which contains innovative methods for treating stormwater, has generated significant media coverage for the City, been adopted by other municipalities and may be considered for Maricopa Association of Government’s (MAG) standards.

Mr. McVay indicated that in contrast to the LID Toolkit, the City still has other tools, such as engineering and Zoning Code standards, which create roadblocks in the development of a sustainable community. He pointed out that if staff is interested in seeking out new tools and guidelines, they must first examine the existing standards that cause issues. He cited, for instance, if developers were asked to consider urban standards for stormwater management, as outlined in the LID Toolkit, and yet the City’s engineering manual did not permit the construction of a certain type of retention basin, then there were various “disconnects” that must be resolved.

Committeemember Finter commented that Tucson has been quite innovative through its use of permeable asphalt, which allows the movement of stormwater through the surface. He spoke in support of such technology and urged staff to research its use in Mesa.

Mr. McVay responded that if developers wanted to use a new method of stormwater management that has not been tested, it would be necessary for them, on a case-by-case

basis, to convince the City's engineering staff that they could lower the runoff coefficient in a sufficient manner. He stated that the permeable asphalt was a good example, in that a developer could prove today that it would be an effective method of stormwater management, but perhaps not in 20 years.

Mr. Wesley concluded the presentation by stating that staff was seeking direction from the Committee with respect to the following items: understanding where different development forms are appropriate; having the resources available to examine and update tools; determining priorities for sub-area planning and updating tools; and continuing to plan and bring tools into alignment with the vision of the General Plan.

Chairman Thompson stated that he would like staff to define the term "quality" so that everyone, including staff and the developers, would have a better understanding of what a quality product/development should be. He also remarked that with respect to the City's codes and guidelines, he inquired whether there could be some flexibility or tradeoffs as it relates to certain development standards. He suggested that perhaps staff could create "a menu" of a number of standards with which a developer must comply, but also allow for some deviation in an effort to avoid "cookie cutter" designs.

Committeemember Finter commented that with respect to the theme of demanding higher development standards, one of his favorite sayings, which he attributes to Committeemember Richins, is as follows: "If you can build it in Scottsdale, you can build it here." He remarked that areas of the community will be impacted for decades due to a "hodgepodge" of development standards, resulting in a public safety and code enforcement nightmare.

Committeemember Finter also noted that he expected higher development standards to become the norm in Mesa. He cited, by way of example, a new development at Dana Park Ranch, which will include high quality products and materials. He further expressed support for staff pursuing the sub-area plan process and soliciting citizen feedback.

Committeemember Richins stated that objective standards, whether in the form of a menu or however structured, would bring certainty to the development community in order to invest in a project in Mesa. He noted, on the other hand, if the standards are subjective, it brings uncertainty, especially if they mean one thing to one person and something different to another person. He also spoke regarding the many new and innovative products that are available in the marketplace. He urged that staff embrace changes in technology in order to complete processes "better, faster and cheaper." He added that he would caution against City's standards only allowing the use of certain materials, with the exception of areas such as the Desert Uplands.

Chairman Thompson provided additional input as follows: he would urge good quality, objective standards, as opposed to minimum standards; he would prefer a menu option, since it would allow a developer greater flexibility; and that it was important for the City to adjust its development standards to meet future demands.

Mr. Wesley thanked the Committeemembers for their comments and suggestions. He stated that staff would assess and prioritize the feedback and then come back to the Committee for further discussions at a later date. He acknowledged that it is always challenging for staff when

developers want consistency and flexibility and stated that it is sometimes difficult to give them both. He explained that the Zoning Ordinance includes certain guidelines and standards, beginning with objective standards to establish what is trying to be accomplished. He noted that if a developer has another way in which to achieve that objective, then it is possible for staff to allow some flexibility.

Committeemember Richins thanked Mr. Wesley for his comments and concurred that in dealing with standards and policies, the first question to ask is what is trying to be accomplished.

Chairman Thompson inquired what type of tools staff would like to have in order to accomplish their goals and objectives. He also asked if there were any barriers that the Council, as the policymakers, could assist staff in removing in order to achieve success with respect to updating the standards.

Mr. Wesley responded that one of the main tools that he would like to see staff pursue more extensively is the sub-area plans. He acknowledged that budgetary issues are always challenging and often limit the necessary resources in order to pursue such efforts in greater detail. He also remarked that with respect to the Mesa Strategic Development Plan, there are many ideas that can be implemented in order to maintain sustainability.

Chairman Thompson stated that he would like staff to bring back some ideas with respect to updating the various development standards and also define the term "quality."

Committeemember Finter urged staff to be bold and noted that there were "no wrong answers."

Assistant City Manager Kari Kent commented that staff would come back with some proposals fairly soon and suggested that certain issues might take more time to address.

Chairman Thompson thanked everyone for the informative presentation.

### 3. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Sustainability and Transportation Committee Meeting adjourned at 4:56 p.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Sustainability & Transportation Committee meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2015. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

---

DEE ANN MICKELSEN, CITY CLERK