



Memorandum

TO: Mayor and City Council

THROUGH: Karolyn Kent, Assistant City Manager

FROM: Christine Zielonka, Development Services Director
John Wesley, Planning Director

SUBJECT: Case ZON17-00572, Minor General Plan Amendment from Mixed Use Activity District to Neighborhood, Southwest corner of Thomas and Recker

DATE: March 5, 2018

At their January 17, 2018 hearing, the Planning Zoning Board reviewed and made a recommendation on Minor General Plan Amendment Case ZON17-00572 (and the associated rezoning/site plan, case ZON17-320). Staff's recommendation for these cases was for denial; the Planning and Zoning Board, on a 5-2 vote, has recommended approval. This memo summarizes the Board's reasons for their recommendation for approval and reviews staff's reasons for recommending denial.

The case in question is located at the southwest corner of Recker and Thomas Roads. The site is approximately 27 acres. The proposal is to change the General Plan character designation for this property from Mixed Use Activity District to Neighborhood. The accompanying rezoning and site plan proposes to rezone the property from RS-90 to RSL-4.5-PAD and plat the property with 110, single-residence lots.

At the Planning and Zoning Board hearing, the Board heard from the applicant and several neighbors of the site. The neighbors have significant concerns with commercial uses on this property and supported the idea of having more residential development. The applicant cited the fact that the owner (Desert Troon Companies) has been marketing the property for many years and has not had any interest in the site for non-residential development as a primary reason for requesting the change. The applicant sought the input of the neighborhood in determining what zoning to request for the property. The applicant also pointed out there is not much traffic in this area to attract a non-residential user and the amount of both vacant land and vacant buildings that limit the attraction of this property for non-residential uses.

In discussion and making the motion for approval of the Minor General Plan amendment, the Board cited:

- an overabundance of existing properties vacant in the area for commercial uses;

- additional retail or mixed-use types would create an over saturation of the market; and,
- a hotel use on the site is not feasible as the owner has had the property for years and not been able to develop the site yet.

Staff's recommendation for denial is based on the following factors:

- Every general plan since 1982 has considered this to be a good location for some type of non-residential use, particularly office-type uses.
- The Falcon Field Sub-area Plan, completed in 2007, looked closely at this area with the planned freeway connection and the impacts of air traffic and continued to recommend employment uses for this property.
- The Falcon Field Economic Activity Area Strategic Plan, approved by Council in August 2014, also looked closely at the Falcon Field area and what was needed to continue to grow this vitally important economic area of Mesa. This study, prepared by a panel of citizens with backgrounds in business and development, considered residential as well as non-residential land uses. This Plan also recommends this area for non-residential uses.
- The Loop 202 Freeway was completed in 2008, just as the market crashed. The non-residential market in this area has been slow in coming back. Over the last two years we have begun to see significant non-residential development in the Falcon Field area. The industrial area along Virginia east of Greenfield is almost fully developed; we have processed several cases in Longbow and expect more activity in the near future; and approved a new office building in the Red Mountain Commerce Center on the north side of Thomas.
- The Falcon Field Economic Activity Area, as designated in the General Plan, is one of a very few employment areas Mesa has along a freeway that can be developed for significant employment uses. Protecting our freeway corridors from residential encroachment has been an important factor to Council over the years.
- One of the primary goals of the General Plan is to grow our employment base. We can only do this if we maintain prime locations along a freeway and near an activity generator. A MAG study that was recently released shows Mesa with a net daytime population decrease of more than 27,000 people due to the number of our residents that commute out of Mesa for work while Chandler, Tempe, Scottsdale, and Phoenix have net increases in daytime population.
- If the corner at Thomas and Recker goes for residential uses it will be hard to maintain employment designation on the adjacent properties, particularly to the west along Thomas. Staff has had repeated calls regarding the property to the west and, based on the Planning and Zoning Board's action, it is now being planned for residential development. Staff is also aware that the property to the south is now being considered for residential uses.
- This property and the adjacent properties are under the direct flight path for Falcon Field. While out of the high noise contour area, and further away than other properties already developed for residential uses to the southwest of the Airport, more residential use under the flight path invites more residents who can complain about the noise and cause impacts to the further growth of the Airport.