



Date: November 18, 2020
To: Planning and Zoning Board
From: Rachel Prelog, Senior Planner
Through: Nana Appiah, Planning Director
Subject: **Mesa 2040 General Plan Amendments**- Proposed amendments to Chapter 7 - Community Character and Chapter 16 - Plan Implementation and Amendment of the General Plan.

PURPOSE AND RECOMMENDATION:

As a requirement of the City's General Plan, staff discussed a 3-year comprehensive review and evaluation of the City's General Plan with the City Council on February 13, 2020 and the Planning and Zoning Board (P&Z) on February 26, 2020. During these discussions, staff informed the City Council (Council) of the successes associated with implementation and administration of the General Plan, as well as challenges. Staff informed the P&Z and the Council of challenges specifically associated with Chapters 7 and 16 of the Plan due to certain ambiguity in the text of those chapters. Staff also informed the P&Z and Council of the need to have clear distinctions for specifying certain primary and secondary zoning districts in the character area designations in Chapter 7 of the Plan.

On August 26, 2020 staff discussed the proposed changes with P&Z and received a favorable recommendation to proceed with the changes. Then on September 24, 2020 staff discussed and received directions from the Council to proceed with recommended text amendments to the General Plan to remedy the challenges associated with implementation of Chapter 7 and 16 of the Plan.

Below in this report is a summary of the proposed text changes to the General Plan. Details of the text changes are attached as Exhibit 1 (i.e. Mesa 2040 General Plan Amendments). The specific affected chapters are Chapter 7: Community Character and Chapter 16: Plan Implementation and Amendment. The purpose of the changes are to: (1) Add specific guidance on the amount of primary versus secondary zoning districts permitted in the character areas; (2) Identify primary and secondary land uses in the character areas; (3) Amend the qualification criteria for minor and major amendments; and (4) Establish approval criteria for minor and major General Plan amendments.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

The City adopted the 2040 General Plan in 2014. Development of the Plan included extensive public participation and reviews. Overall, the Plan has the following three interrelated functions:

- An expression of community goals and priorities;
- A decision-making guide; and
- A fulfillment of a legal requirement of state law.

As discussed earlier, the 2040 Mesa General Plan requires a comprehensive review of the Plan's policies and strategies every three years at which time recommendations for amendments and updates to the Plan and implementation tools can be presented to the City Council. The periodic evaluation of the Plan is also consistent with requirements of Arizona State law. Specifically, Arizona State Law (ARS 9-461.07) requires administrative bodies to provide an annual report to its governing body, describing efforts implemented to administer the General Plan over the last year.

Through the recent comprehensive review of the City's General Plan, staff is recommending the following text amendments to the plan:

SUMMARY OF THE AMENDMENTS AND EXPLANATION:

1) Add specific guidance on the amount of primary versus secondary zoning district permitted in the character areas:

Since the Plan's adoption in 2014, the City has experienced enormous request for land use changes to convert many of its employment and mixed-use character areas into residential subdivisions. Such land use changes if not critically examined, could create an imbalance in land use allocations in the City. Also, the preservation of the employment and mixed-use character areas is crucial in maintaining economic vitality and preventing the city from further becoming a bedroom community.

Chapter 7 of the General Plan describes the character areas envisioned in the City and key attributes that form the foundation for establishing each character type. One of the strategies for achieving the goals of the character designation is through the utilization of primary and secondary zoning districts. The intent of the primary zoning district is for it to form the nucleus of the character type with the secondary zoning designation serving as ancillary to the character area designation. Currently, the General Plan has inadequate guidelines to help direct and ensure the primary zoning districts become the foundation of the character areas instead of an over concentration of the secondary zoning districts in the character areas. Therefore, to help provide structured strategies for achieving the goals of the various character designations, staff is recommending the following distinctions and clarity on proportions of zoning districts to be allocated in certain character area designations:

Table 1: Character Areas - Minimum and Maximum Use of Zoning Districts Allowed

Character Type	Primary Zoning Districts (minimum)	Secondary Zoning Districts (maximum)
Neighborhood Village Center	80%	20%
Mixed-Use Activity District	70%	30%
Employment District		

Business Park	70%	30%
Industrial	75%	25%
Employment Core	80%	20%
Specialty District Medical	80%	20%

2) Identify primary and secondary land uses in character areas:

Chapter 7: Community Character, of the General also includes a list of uses categorized as primary and secondary land uses in a number of the character area designations. Similar to the zoning district categories, the General Plan provides inadequate structured strategies for utilizing the primary and secondary land uses to achieve the goals of the character area designations. This lack of guidance has become a hindrance to effectively implement the General Plan and achieve the intended goals of the City. To remedy the challenges emanating from the ambiguity in the appropriate utilization of the primary and secondary land uses, staff is recommending the adoption of a percentage of primary and secondary land uses for each character types as follows:

Table 2: Character Areas - Minimum and Maximum Use of Land Uses Allowed

Character Type	Primary Land Uses (minimum)	Secondary Land Uses (maximum)
Neighborhood Village Center	80%	20%
Mixed-Use Activity District	70%	30%
Mixed Use Community	40%	60%
Employment District		
Business Park	70%	30%
Industrial	75%	25%
Employment Core	80%	20%
Specialty District Medical	80%	20%
Mixed Use Community*	40% commercial	--

**Requires the establishments of Planned Community (PC) zoning district which does not contain a standard list of permitted land uses. 40% of the proposed land uses must be reserved for commercial use.*

The utilization of the required percentages for land uses in unison with zoning designations will help achieve the goals for the various character designations. For the administration and implementation of the required allocations, generally a proposed development may be required to meet the designated percentages or could be allowed to utilize already established land uses within a character area to fulfill the percentage required. This is if a majority of the character area is already developed with a proportion of certain land uses. Also, the City Council will have the authority to adjust the required percentage for the primary and secondary uses through the review of proposed projects.

3) Amend the qualification criteria for minor and major amendments:

Currently, the General Plan has a standard land acreage requirement for amendments irrespective of the context of the area in the City. Specifically, the Plan considers any request less than 320 acres of land as a minor amendment and anything beyond 320 as a major amendment. This generic categorization is less effective in considering context of an area in land use changes. The 320-land area for major amendments has also been a challenge for implementing and achieving goals for the character area designations, as any large area of land, less than 320 acres in the City, can be changed drastically to another character designation as a minor general plan amendment.

To continue to implement effective strategies to achieve the goals of the General Plan, staff is recommending adopting a reduction in the acreage requirements for major amendments in the City, as well as adopt a criteria to distinguish a General Plan amendments in the City's downtown core from those outside the core. This is because the impact of a 10-acre character area change in the core of the City will be different from undeveloped areas on the fringe. Specifically, staff is requesting any General Plan amendment greater than 10 acres in the Downtown area to be considered as a major amendments, and any amendment greater than 160 acres in any area of the City to be considered a major amendment. These changes align with requirements of a number of municipalities in metro-area.

4) Provide approval criteria for minor and major General Plan amendments:

Chapter 16 of the General Plan consist of strategies for implementing the Plan as well as amendments. However, there is not clear criteria to help guide evaluation of proposed amendments to the various character area designations. Such ambiguity impedes effective administration of the General Plan to establish a structure of consistency and predictability in the city's land use administration processes. Therefore, to help create structure and continue to improve the City's land use administration, staff is recommending adopting criteria to utilize for proposed amendments to the Plan as follows:

1. Whether the proposed amendment to the General Plan Character Area will result in a shortage of land for other planned uses. For example, whether the change will result in a substantial and undesirable reduction in the amount of available land for employment or higher density housing development.
2. Whether events subsequent to the adoption of the Plan have changed the character or condition of the area making the proposed amendment appropriate.
3. The degree to which the proposed amendment will impact the whole community or a portion of the community by:
 - a. Altering acceptable existing land use patterns in a significant way that is contrary to the goals, policies, and strategies identified in the Plan.

- b. Requiring larger or more extensive improvements to roads, sewer, or water systems than are necessary to support the prevailing land uses which may negatively impact development of other lands.
 - c. Adversely impacting existing uses due to increased traffic congestion that is not accommodated by planned roadway improvements or other planned transportation improvements such as nonmotorized transportation alternatives and transit.
- 4. Consistency of the proposed amendment with the vision, goals, policies, and strategies of the Plan.
 - 5. Does the proposed amendment constitute an overall improvement to the General Plan and the City of Mesa.
 - 6. The extent to which the benefits of the proposed amendment outweigh any of the impacts identified in this subsection.

These criteria will help guide both staff and stakeholders in their evaluating of proposed amendments to the Plan and create a certain level of consistency in the review process.

RECOMMENDATION

After thorough evaluation of the Mesa 2040 General Plan, and research of best practices in land use administration, and public meetings, staff is recommending approval of the proposed amendments to the General Plan.