



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Vice Mayor
Judy Chirco

SUBJECT: GP09-T-04

DATE: November 25, 2009

Approved

Judy Chirco p H

Date

11-25-09

RECOMMENDATION

Approve staff recommendation on GP09-T-04 with the following direction to the City Manager to perform, examine and/or evaluate all of the following elements at the Planned Development Rezoning stage:

1. Conduct extensive community outreach for any Planned Development Rezoning application on this site. Work to hold a meeting with members of the 9th District Action Committee, planning staff, and the applicant to discuss neighborhood compatibility and site design.
2. Ensure that the project massing is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.
 - a. Any podium project on this site shall comply with the development standards approved as part of the current zoning in 2002, which require that buildings fronting Yucca Ave. be predominately two stories, to a maximum height of 35 feet, but allow a few three story elements, to a maximum height of 45 feet.
 - b. At the rezoning stage, I recommend strengthening these standards by establishing a set proportion of two and three story elements consistent with the proportion shown in the conceptual architecture for the current zoning.
3. Minimize traffic on surrounding streets.
 - a. Ensure that the underground residential garage does not take access off of Yucca Ave.
 - b. Pursue direct vehicular access to the underground garage via the planned shared driveway that will run between Hillsdale Ave. and the shopping center parking lot., to provide a direct route to Meridian Ave.
 - c. Allow alternate use of the shopping center parking lot for overflow parking from the residential project.
4. Consider the Planning Commission's suggestion to include requirements in the rezoning that the commercial portion of the site be built before or at the same time as the residential portion.

5. Pursue the applicant's offer of funding for traffic calming improvements through study and community outreach at the appropriate stage of the development process.
6. Achieve a high standard of design that establishes a residential character compatible with the existing neighborhood and a pedestrian-friendly environment.
 - a. Include front stoops or porches for first floor units facing Yucca Ave.
 - b. Minimize the height of the above ground portion of the parking garage.
 - c. Provide pedestrian access from the proposed development into the shopping center in order to provide residents with convenient access to community-serving retail.
 - d. Provide street trees along the Yucca Ave. and Hillsdale Ave. project frontages.

BACKGROUND

The Hacienda Gardens project has generated great community interest and activism for over eight years, longer than I have been on the Council. In that time we have seen some progress towards redevelopment of the center, but the southern portion remains incomplete and resembles a construction site. This slow pace has been a source of great frustration for both the community and the applicant.

With the General Plan Amendment before us, the applicant seeks to move forward with the residential project at a density of 25-50 units per acre, and, in another application currently on file, proposes to build a new retail building for Rite Aide, a current tenant. Neighboring residents, many of whom have participated in planning this site since 2001, have voiced serious concern that the proposed increase in density would give rise to neighborhood compatibility issues, such as increased traffic and excessive building heights. I attended the community meeting for this project and have met with members of the 9th District Action Committee in an effort to listen to and understand their concerns.

ANALYSIS

I believe that the proposed density increase could raise neighborhood compatibility issues that must be examined and addressed. My approach in this memo is to recommend that the Council approve the staff recommendation, but to ask the Council to provide additional guidance and direction as to some elements that can impact neighborhood compatibility that should be examined and evaluated before the Planned Development Rezoning comes back to Council for consideration. My first and most important recommendation is that any rezoning should be brought forward with extensive community outreach. Previous projects on this site have benefited immensely from community involvement; my own thinking on this application has been shaped by conversations with community members. Open conversation between the community, staff, and the applicant is the way forward for this project.

Project height and massing is one of the neighborhood's most serious concerns. I have heard fears that the small single-family houses on Yucca Ave. will be overwhelmed by a massive high-density project. My recommendation is that when the rezoning comes before the Council for consideration, the Council would carry forward the height standards in the existing PD Zoning, which were designed to create a compatible interface across Yucca; they establish a predominately two-story character, and allow limited three story elements to add architectural interest. (This direction is consistent with item 3 on page 8 of the staff report.)

Increased traffic and neighborhood cut-through has been a consistent community concern. Under the current zoning, the project takes access off of Yucca Ave., a neighborhood street. Extending the project site to Hillsdale, as contemplated under the new proposal, will allow alternative access options. The applicant discussed one of these options, access off of Hillsdale, at the community meeting and heard feedback that a right-only exit on Hillsdale might make Yucca a cut-through for traffic trying to go north on Meridian. To address this concern, I recommend pursuing access to the underground garage via the planned shared driveway that runs between Hillsdale Ave. and the shopping center parking lot. Access to this driveway would allow a direct route to Meridian Ave. through the center's parking lot. (This direction is consistent with item 1 on page 8 of the staff report.)

At the Planning Commission hearing on this item, several commissioners expressed interest in requiring that the commercial portion of the site be built out before or at the same time as the residential portion. I agree with the Commission that completion of the commercial would be of benefit to the surrounding community and recommend that staff consider its suggestion as part of any rezoning of the site.

As part of the current zoning, the applicant offered to contribute \$10,000 for a post-project traffic study, intended to evaluate potential operational improvements at the intersections of Meridian Ave. and Lama Way, Meridian Ave. and Koch Lane, Foxworthy Ave. and Yucca Ave, and Foxworthy Ave. and Meridian Ave. In conversation with the applicant, up to \$1000 per unit was identified as mitigation, at the appropriate time, based on the result of the traffic study and community outreach.

Finally, I have included several recommendations on project design for consideration when the project is brought forward. This project should be designed to a high standard, with the goal of creating a pedestrian-friendly community hub that serves as a gathering place for current and future residents alike.

COORDINATION

This memo has been coordinated with the Department of Planning Building and Code Enforcement, the Department of Transportation and the City Attorney's Office.