

**CITY OF EL MIRAGE
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 9, 2010**

I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Doug Doede called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led the Pledge.

II. ROLL CALL

Members present were Doug Doede, Brandon Forrey, Bill Morrison, Mary Koestner, and Beth Simek. Staff members present were Community Development Director George Flores and Senior Planner Mark Smith.

III. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 15, 2010

Beth Simek made a motion for approval of the minutes of September 15, 2010. Mary Koestner seconded the motion. The motion passed 5 to 0.

IV. CONTINUANCES [NONE]

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. Presentation on Status of Capital Improvement Projects

George Flores said the Commission had an interest in the City Capital Improvements Project plans. City Engineer Lance Calvert had a conflict and was not available tonight. It would be best if he addressed nuances. The City relies on federal and state funds and there is never enough money for all projects. The City aggressively pursues funding and has done a good job making its needs known to other cities larger than us. Lance Calvert and Intergovernmental Affairs Coordinator Pat Dennis could tell where we are in the negotiations at the next meeting. The Engineer had provided a status report on pending projects. Flores asked if any commissioners had specific questions to focus on.

Beth Simek said she had several. She noted that the packets should be double-sided copies to save money. Her first question was about the \$8 million federal grant opportunity. The City received \$100,000 of this fund. She then asked about reducing the noise level of the audible signals at the new Dysart and Thunderbird intersection. She had walked through there in the early morning and it could be heard in the neighborhood nearby. Brandon Forrey thought that once the signal was audible per ADA there was no going back. Flores said staff would see if it met or exceeded code. A third concern was the 2-year wait for an agreement with Surprise on the traffic signal at Dysart and Peoria. Her fourth concern was when the design would be complete for the fire station. Flores said the need would be determined by the new Council along with CDBG and HOME projects.

Doug Doede asked about ARRA Stimulus Plan funding. George Flores said the City was aggressive in participating in every grant process it can. The formula is based on population versus need, and it is still not enough to meet the needs of larger cities. Doede asked about the status of the El Mirage Design Concept Review. Flores said the plan consultants did an excellent job in having public meetings and reducing takings costs south of Thunderbird. Council must now budget for the City share of the project.

2. Discussion on New Form-Based Development Code Changes

George Flores introduced the item by stating that voters approved the General Plan by a 2-to-1 margin. Staff held public meetings and sent out 10,000 door hangers to get the notice out. In these meetings no one was opposed. One man was concerned about its impact on Luke Air Force Base, but staff assured him that there were ways that the Base and the City could peacefully co-exist. The only time staff had seen such crowds is regarding annexation of Salt River-Pima-Maricopa Indian Community mining lands along the Agua Fria River. Their number one question was if the City was going to buy property to implement the Plan. Half of them were disappointed when staff said no since they wanted to be bought out. They asked how and when it would happen. Staff explained that it was a plan, like parents planning to send their children to college. It does detail how or when. The City received an award from Valley Forward along with a plan by Scottsdale, Tempe, and Phoenix. It was an honor to come in second to those cities. AS we get into the implementation document there will be a lot of changes to City codes. He noted the article from Governing Magazine about a Miami planner. Staff recommends skipping December and beginning in January on code changes needed to implement the Plan.

Mark Smith then led the Commission through the information on Miami, Mesa, and Flagstaff that was included in the packet pointing out the need to calibrate or adjust the basic code to local conventions. He then explained the rural-to-urban transect on which the form-based SmartCode was based, relating the various steps on the transect to parts of the City: T-1 Wilderness was appropriate to the floodplain; T-2 Rural was like the Dysart Ranchettes; T-3 Suburban was the typical development in the City's Neighborhoods; T-4 General Urban was the vision for the Arts District downtown; T-5 Urban Center was appropriate for redevelopment along Thunderbird and Grand and the Agua Fria Gateway; T-6 Urban Core was the vision for the new Central Business District north of Grand. He then referred the Commission through the land use, setback, and building configuration tables, noting that the SmartCode was a good base but must be modified to fit local developments and laws. He said staff would allow the Commission to study the text and get familiar with it and would bring back their recommendations at the next Commission meeting.

Form-based codes allow mixed use: residential, office, retail, industrial – in areas of greatest need such as downtown and north of Grand. When the rail yard moves out the City has the opportunity to transition itself. The studios were open the night of the public meetings and citizens could see the Arts District part of the plan becoming reality already. Mary Koestner asked about the effect on the existing communities. Staff noted that the Plan embraces the fact that we need to make the neighborhoods stronger. Doug Doede alluded to Verado’s mixed uses right next to each other and across the street and it was built from scratch. He also asked about signs. Smith noted that the SmartCode refers to different signs in each transect.

Doug Doede asked about tax breaks. George Flores said tax abatements can be used to encourage development using the example of the Arizona Center in Phoenix. Doede noted that the Sun City medical area used courtyard development. Smith noted that these can be done by right in certain areas under the proposed code. Flores asked if staff were on the right path. Commissioners thought so but some were still trying to grasp it. Smith said the tables were different but were easier to use once they were used to them. They invite flexibility but produce predictable results.

Flores suggested more discussion and direction from a focus group of Phoenix area developers and public meetings. We do not want to lose the community. Many sensed excitement with the artists in residence, and the City’s recent solar construction was the first public use of solar in Arizona.

Flores said Simek had excellent questions on the capital improvement projects list and staff would have Lance Calvert respond. Staff was also available for individual briefings and would have more information in January. The Chair said staff had done a good job promoting the General Plan to the public. George Flores said it was a group effort with Sharon Antes spending countless hours editing the document and the consultant, The Planning Center, and its principal Maria Masque in particular, had done excellent work and taken it upon themselves to nominate of the Plan to Valley Forward and to the American Planning Association for awards.

VI. COMMENTS FROM COMMISSION MEMBERS [NONE]

VII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business, Chair Doug Doede adjourned the meeting at 7:19 p.m.

Mark L. Smith, Senior Planner

Doug Doede, Commission Chair

George Flores, Comm. Dev. Director

Rick Flaaen, City Attorney