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City: Key nexus can handle traffic influx

Scottsdale projects at Camelback set

By Edward Gately

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Where Camelback and Scottsdale roads intersect is one of the Valley's premier destinations, surrounded by high-end shopping, dining, offices and luxury housing.

It's also a busy intersection — one that is crawling with scores of tourists each spring and winter and plenty of locals year-round.

It could get even busier in the next few years.

The area is set to draw thousands of new residents with the addition of large-scale, high-

rise condominium and apartment projects. With that increased population will come more traffic on both Camelback and Scottsdale roads, as well as nearby streets.

Can the intersection handle the increase?

"We believe it can," said Paul Porell, Scottsdale's traffic engineering director. "Basically, we feel that the additional traffic that would be generated by residential will fill in some of the gaps that are currently available in the traffic stream throughout the day."

His optimism is somewhat tempered, though: "(That's) not to say there won't be some increase in congestion, but we don't feel the level of service

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will degrade to the point where it becomes a problem."

Traffic would be worse if all of these properties were being developed commercially, Porell said.

"Commercial development has a much stronger peaking pattern than residential," he said. "Everybody arrives at 8 a.m. and leaves at 5 p.m. Residential is more spread out throughout the day."

New residential buildings as high as 11 stories within close proximity are on the drawing board.

The first project, now under construction, is Optima Sonoran Village, a condominium complex at the southeastern corner of Camelback and 68th Street, west of Scottsdale Fashion Square. Optima, the developer, is seeking amended development standards to increase the height of a building along Camelback Road from seven to 11 stories, a maximum of 129 feet, and to increase the number of units from 493 to 781.

John Berry, a zoning attorney representing Optima, agreed the residential buildings will create much less traffic than if the property housed a commercial development.

The revised plan for the complex calls for a decrease in commercial space from 40,000 square feet to 12,500 square feet, reducing commercial traffic associated with it, he said.

"The other benefit of residential is they can walk, they can ride their bikes or get on a trolley," he said.

Just north of the Scottsdale and Camelback intersection and east of Fashion Square, Gray Development Group expects to begin construction of its Blue Sky apartment complex by the end of the year. It includes 749 units. Its tallest building would be about the same height as Optima's.

The traffic plan conducted as part of the rezoning process demonstrated the "surrounding intersections would continue to perform at acceptable levels" even after the completion of Blue Sky and the second phase of the adjacent Safari Drive condominium complex, with 160 units, said Brian Kearney, Gray's chief operating officer.

Also in the area, Phoenix-based Alliance Residential plans to build a 259-unit apartment complex at the Scottsdale Waterfront, near the southeastern corner of Goldwater Boulevard and Camelback.

Several other residential projects also are planned for the downtown area.

The city has examined the impact of traffic in the downtown area if all properties are developed to the highest zoning potential, with greater heights and density, and the results haven't suggested there will be traffic problems in the future, Porell said.