

Outcry over council move allowing health buildings

By Edward Gately

THE REPUBLIC | AZCENTRAL.COM

Despite a roomful of opposition, the Scottsdale City Council cleared the way Tuesday for development of an 80-bed residential health and memory-care facility on 5 acres at the southwestern corner of Lone Mountain and Scottsdale roads.

"We moved from Phoenix out here because it's not crowded, the houses are not close to each other and we have more privacy here," said Jandark Savaya, who lives next to the property. "Before we bought our land, we came to the city and they told us no commercial, only residential for families. I'm very upset. I'm not going to have privacy."

The council voted, 5-2, to approve a text amendment allowing a residential health-care facility as a conditional use in the R1-70 single family residential zoning district. It also approved a conditional use permit for the facility, and resolutions vacating and abandoning public rights of way near the site.

Councilman Bob Littlefield and Councilwoman Marg Nelssen voted against the plan.

"We're up here to implement what you want and this is not it," Littlefield told residents. "It is our job to turn it down. It doesn't matter what I want, it's what you want."

Attorney John Berry represents the property owner, Lone Mountain Retail, and said the text amendment, as opposed to a rezoning, was the correct procedure for allowing an elder-care facility on acreage that is zoned for single-family residential, and that the site is the proper location for such a facility.

Carlsbad, Calif.-based Integral Senior Living wants to develop the assisted-living facility. It has a facility in Phoenix and this would be its first in Scottsdale.

Berry said the three-building facility will look like three large, custom homes and will include 16 beds per acre, a 100-foot barrier along Scottsdale Road and 60 percent open space on the land. The text amendment offers a better option for allowing housing diversity in a residential district without modifying zoning or obstructing the Foothills Overlay zoning district, he said.

Berry told the council he has received more than 100 statements of support for the project. However, no supporters were evident at the meeting.

Instead, a long procession of residents spoke against the project, saying it goes against the General Plan and the city's intention to preserve the Sonoran Desert and Foothills Overlay.

Robert Cappel, who lives a mile south of the site, said he and other residents have worked hard to protect the surrounding environment and that this proposal undermines that effort.

"I'm a member of the aging population ... and I would like to remind the council that this facility is not wanted and not needed," he said.

Many residents said approving the text amendment would pave the way for others to seek text amendments for commercial development in R1-70 single family residential areas.

Councilman Wayne Ecton made the motion to approve the applicant's requests, saying there is a need for affordable, quality assisted-living facilities, and that the location is well-suited for this type of facility.

He added an amendment that the development have a floor-area ratio consistent with other types of facilities that are in residential areas.

"I'm going to make a lot of people mad and lose some friends, but I will support this," he said. "It's not for a shopping center or a night club ... but a beautiful assisted living (facility) and I think the community should embrace this."

Nelssen said this will be a commercial facility operating 24 hours, with traffic coming and going, and outdoor lights.

"We don't want a commercial facility there," she said. "If this is such a great project, then you (Berry) should go tell your client to put it in an appropriate place."

Residents left the meeting unhappy, and one shouted, "Election's coming, folks." "I think most of us agree that it's important to have facilities, we're just saying we already have approved measures for what type of facility to do this job for residents," said Richard Hetke, who lives about a mile south of the site. "Why is it necessary or even desirable to change those specifications?"