

Planning group gives Portales a thumbs-up

By Edward Gately

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A proposed 369-unit apartment complex west of Portales Corporate Center received a favorable recommendation from the Scottsdale Planning Commission on Wednesday, but not until after extensive debate over adding a right-turn-only exit to curb westbound traffic on Chaparral Road.

Dallas-based JLB Partners wants to develop the nine-building complex on the 9.6-acre parcel near the southwest corner of Scottsdale and Chaparral roads. Portales Corporate Center is to the east, Optima Camelview Village is to the south, and single-family residences are west and north of the site.

The commission recommended City Council approval of the request to modify the original zoning stipulations and amended development standards, and a new development plan for the complex.

Portales Place, the last project to be built on the site, included 126 condominiums. Scottsdale-based Grace Communities started excavation of the project in December 2005, but the complex never materialized and the acreage remains vacant.

The new project would feature apartments geared toward an older demographic that earns more than \$100,000 annually, said John Berry, a zoning attorney representing JLB. Primary access would be off Goldwater Boulevard and secondary access off Chaparral at 70th Place.

Current development standards allow a maximum building height of 65 feet, but the maximum building height of the complex would be 50 feet. Both Portales Corporate Center and Optima Camelview are 65 feet.

The tallest buildings would be adjacent to Portales Corporate Center and along Goldwater Boulevard across from Optima Camelview, with lower buildings near the single-family homes on the west side of the site. The complex would include 40 percent open space, Berry said.

Berry described the site as a "big, ugly hole in the ground" that over the years was proposed for hotel, residential and retail projects.

This proposal calls for "less building, less height and lots of open space," he said.

Numerous nearby residents told the

commission the project would substantially increase traffic along Chaparral and at the Scottsdale Road intersection. Kim Sullivan, an Optima Camelview resident, said people already "take your life into your hands any time you navigate that intersection," and this project will only increase that danger.

Roxann Gallagher, who lives in the neighborhood north of the site, said the project will bring 500 renters with no vested interest to the area, and "the fabric of our neighborhood ... will be gone."

JLB agreed to numerous planning staff stipulations, including paying for improvements along the south side of Chaparral and the addition of an east-bound right-turn lane at the Scottsdale Road intersection. Also, the developer will rebuild the roundabout at Chaparral and 70th Place.

Berry presented the commission with a list of changes to the stipulations, including the addition of a right-turn-only lane at the roundabout to force traffic from the complex to head east on Chaparral toward Scottsdale Road.

Paul Porcell, the city's traffic engineering director, said the city is planning extensive improvements along Chaparral west of Scottsdale Road, including improved pedestrian access, landscaped medians and curves in the road to "calm traffic" and make it less likely to attract cut-through traffic.

Porcell staunchly opposed the inclusion of the right-turn-only lane at the roundabout, saying it won't stop drivers from going west on Chaparral and will create a dangerous situation with drivers turning east, and then doing u-turns to drive west.

"This device does not work," he said. "We have tried it at too many locations."

The commission's favorable recommendation allows the right-turn-only lane at the roundabout. Commissioner Matthew Cody said the apartment complex is a "fine project" and that it's common sense to push traffic east, so the right turn-only lane makes sense.

The commission also recommended council approval of three conditional-use permits for medical-marijuana. The applicants include: M.M.R.X. at 15455 N. Greenway-Hayden Loop, Suite C-22; Giving Tree Wellness Center of Arizona, at 7655 E. Evans Road; and Valley Wellness Center, at 7825 E. Redfield Road.