

# City's aesthetic harmony no accident

Panel influences look of new developments

By Edward Gately  
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When Triyar Entertainment's beach-club complex opens early next year in downtown Scottsdale, it will include more shade trees, and will be more attractive to pedestrians and passing motorists than originally envisioned.

When the city extends Northsight Boulevard to alleviate traffic congestion at Hayden Road and Frank Lloyd Wright Boulevard, the landscaping will strike just the right balance of being a visual treat while not too much of a distraction for passing motorists.

And if Triyar's Industry East and Industry West apartment complexes are built in the downtown entertainment district, they won't look like giant glass and concrete walls along Stetson Drive.

Those visual guarantees didn't come about by chance. They are the result of a seven-member panel that holds great influence over the aesthetic appearance of projects that are built throughout Scottsdale.

The Development Review Board, a low-profile but crucial part of the city's public planning-approval process, is charged with making sure developments look better than anywhere else in the Valley, right down to the color of the walls, and the placement of stones and shrubs.

The panel's work typically takes place after a project is approved by the City Council.

"The board's focus is to make sure that the projects that council passes adhere to the city's design guidelines, are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood and meet design stipulations set by the council," said David Gulino, a board member.

As the economy begins to pick up and more projects move to break ground, the DRB, as it's commonly known, will become even more critical.

The Planning Commission's focus is on land use and zoning for future development, while the Development Review Board is more "what's being developed now," said Dan Symer, senior city planner.

"You're more likely to see more development applications go before the board during a busier economy than a slower



Optima Camelview Village's landscaping must adhere to Scottsdale's visual guidelines. ROBERT LEGER/THE REPUBLIC

one," he said. "When the economy is ready for that development, they go to the board."

## Limiting its scope

Individual zoning districts dictate whether an applicant starts the public-approval process with the board before advancing to the commission and City Council.

In many cases, the board is the last step in the process before an applicant requests a building permit. Its decisions can be appealed to the council.

Some community activists, like Sonnie Kirtley, chairwoman of the Coalition of Greater Scottsdale, and former may-

oral candidate John Washington, say the board should be able to consider all aspects of how a proposed development could affect the community, such as what public benefits are offered in exchange for amended development standards and whether a particular use fits within an area.

Board members have been steered away from inquiring about those issues by Steve Venker, board coordinator, and Jose Padilla, senior assistant city attorney.

"The commissioners ceased their concern even though their purpose statement includes this," Kirtley said.

Padilla, the board's legal adviser, said those issues fall under the purview of the

Planning Commission.

"Someone might complain that there are too many apartments in an area, but the board is not the commission," he said. "The commission makes recommendations on whether the proposed use is a good fit."

## The right look

The board's members are serious about each project's aesthetic appeal, sometimes even to the befuddlement of nearby residents.

For example, at its Oct. 18 meeting, the board discussed and then made a rec-

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ommendation to the commission regarding the design compatibility, environmental responsiveness, solar shading, connectivity and open spaces for the Las Aguas apartments to be built on McDowell Road near 68th Street.

The parcel abuts single-family homes to the north, and residents have been concerned about potential impacts on their neighborhood. However, John Berry, a zoning attorney representing Chason Development, worked with residents to resolve their issues.

The board was presented with changes made to appease residents, such as higher-pitched roofs on the garages along the north side to further block the view from residents.

Robert LaRoche, one of the nearby homeowners, told the board the residents are in agreement on the changes.

However, Planning Commissioner David Brantner said the "strange pitch" of the roofs will "look terrible" from a design standpoint.



Chris Jones

Board Vice Chairman Eric Gerster agreed, saying that while it's a great idea, it "doesn't work" in terms of design compatibility.

"Nobody will be looking at it but us," LaRoche said.

## Membership

The board is required to include one council member, one commission member, and five public members — three who are architects, landscape architects, environmental scientists or people with design training or experience; and two land developers, builders or contractors.

The board currently is short one public member, and the council will make an appointment in December.



David Gulino

Councilwoman Suzanne Klapp and Brantner have completed their three-month rotations on the board.

The board's public members serve three-year terms and are appointed by the council. They include Ali Fakih, an engineer; Gerster, a land-development consultant; Gulino, an engineer and real-estate broker; and Chris Jones, a landscape architect and community planner.

"I think it's great that we have so many members that are in the business community in Scottsdale," Brantner said.

"That means they're active in the market, they know what the market trends are... they're in the trenches and they're professional in what they do. They know good and bad architecture, and good and bad planning."



Eric Gerster



Ali Fakih

## PUBLIC MEMBERS

The Development Review Board's public membership includes:

» Ali Fakih, principal/owner of Sustainability Engineering Group, a Scottsdale-based civil engineering firm.

» Eric Gerster, owner/operator of Terrevelution, a Scottsdale-based real-estate consulting firm specializing in entitlement work for residential and commercial property.

» David Gulino, owner/founder of Land Development Services, a Scottsdale-based project management consulting firm.

» Chris Jones, senior project manager at Anderson Baron, a Chandler-based planning and design firm.

Fakih said he was appointed because the city requires members with experience in development.

"Every case that comes before the board, I put myself in the shoes of the residents of Scottsdale, neighbors, designers, developers and city staffs," he said.