

Condo project gets OK for changes

More height, more units for Sonoran Village

By Edward Gately
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A five-building condominium complex under construction west of Scottsdale Fashion Square now will include an 11-story building along Camelback Road and 288 additional units.

The City Council on Tuesday voted to approve an amended site plan, amended development standards and a downtown infill-incentive district application for Optima Sonoran Village, at the southeastern corner of Camelback and 68th Street. In 2010, the council approved a site plan that included 493 units and a maximum building height of 65 feet.

Optima, the developer, sought the increased height and unit count under the city's downtown infill-incentive district and plan, which allow developers to request amended development standards

Bob Littlefield was the only council member to vote no. He opposes the infill-incentive district and plan, saying developers are using them to increase the value of their property while offering public benefits the council already should require for approval.

"You had an approval and you should have stuck with it," he said. "This is gold digging."

Mayor Jim Lane said he had concerns about the impact on traffic and the surrounding neighborhood, but he now believes "this will be a positive addition to Scottsdale."

The approval allows Optima to increase the height of the building along Camelback by four stories. The complex descends in height toward the south, with the lowest buildings adjacent to single-family residences.

Optima plans to invest \$400 million in

the complex, and the first phase should be completed in 2014. Optima also developed the Optima Camelview Village condominiums at Scottsdale Road and Rancho Vista Drive.

The length of the building along Camelback has been reduced by more than 40 percent, while the amount of commercial space in the complex also has been decreased from 40,000 square feet to 12,500 square feet, said John Berry, a zoning attorney representing Optima.

David Hovey Sr., Optima's president and owner, said Optima Sonoran Village will be the "best development Optima has ever done." This past weekend, Optima received a top award from the American Institute of Architects for Optima Camelview Village.

"We as a family have personally invested \$800 million in downtown Scottsdale," he said. "Within three years, this will be a completely finished development that will be a great asset to Scottsdale."

Some nearby residents, such as Howard Schwartz, expressed concerns that the higher unit count will lead to more vehicles and more traffic on 68th Street. Others, like Paula Christensen, thanked Hovey for cooperating with neighbors and addressing their concerns.

Councilwoman Lisa Borowsky said she has opposed the infill-incentive district and plan because they hadn't prompted projects that were beneficial to the public. Optima Sonoran Village, however, is an exception, she said. She once resided at Optima Camelview Village.

"We should all be thrilled that the Hoveys and their projects are a part of our community," she said.

Councilman Ron McCullagh said he agrees with much of Littlefield's perception that the district and plan will change the character of the city, "but it's done and it's time to move on."

"I'm very happy once again to see that this project has the neighborhood's support," he said.