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# PLANNING COMMISSION

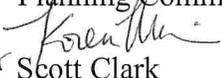
Planning & Development Services Department • 201 N. Stone Ave. • Tucson, AZ 85701

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**Date:** November 15, 2018

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**To:** Planning Commission

**From:** *for*   
Scott Clark  
Executive Secretary

**Subject:** C8-18-07 Hospital Helipads Unified Development Code Text  
Amendment – Study Session (Citywide)

**Issue** – This is a public hearing to allow the Planning Commission to deliberate on the proposed amendment to the Unified Development Code (UDC) to allow helipads as an accessory use to hospitals.

It has recently come to the attention of the Planning and Development Services Department that our code does not allow helipads as an accessory use at major medical facilities, which includes hospitals. Helipads allow helicopters carrying patients to land safely at a hospital, serving a critical function in emergency health care. Major medical service uses, including hospitals, are allowed by right in most commercial, office and industrial zones and through a special exception in some residential zones. This code amendment would permit helipads as an accessory use to a hospital in all zones where hospitals are permitted and would impose use-specific standards on the helipad use.

**Recommendation** – Staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend approval of the proposed amendments to the UDC to allow helipads as an accessory use to hospitals.

**Background** – On September 6, 2018, Council Member Shirley Scott submitted a letter to the City Clerk requesting that the zoning for hospital helipads be discussed by Mayor & Council on September 25, 2018. Council Member Scott pointed out that the City's current code does not allow hospitals to develop helipads and requested that Mayor & Council initiate a code change to allow helipads as accessory uses at major medical services. During the study session on September 25, 2018, Mayor & Council directed staff to develop a code change that would allow helipads as accessory uses at major medical facilities of the scale of Tucson Medical Center, Banner, St. Joseph's, St. Mary's and Kino.

Presently, helipads are classified as a commercial land use under Transportation Service, Air Carrier (11.3.4.Y). This use is permitted only in I-2 industrial zones through a Mayor & Council Special Exception (4.8.7).

Despite this restriction, helipads are currently found at all six major hospitals in Tucson. Planned Area Developments approved for Tucson Medical Center, Banner University Medical Center, Banner University Medical Center South (Kino), and St. Joseph's have designated a helipad as an allowed use. Helipads are also located on the campuses of

Carondelet St. Mary's and the Veteran's Administration Hospital. These uses pre-date zoning regulations and in the case of the VA Hospital, are not bound by City zoning.

Hospitals are considered a major medical service (11.3.4.Q) and are permitted in O-2, O-3, C-1, C-2, C-3, OCR-1, OCR-2, P-1, I-1, and I-2 zones and allowed through a Zoning Examiner special exception in R-2 and R-3 zones.

Except in I-2 zones, where a special exception to allow a helipad has been established in the code, there is not a clear pathway should a new hospital seek to obtain approval to build a helipad in the future.

On October 24, 2018, the Planning Commission held a study session to review the proposed hospital helipad text amendment. At that time the Planning Commission voted to set the item for Public Hearing on November 15, 2018.

**Present Considerations** – Pursuant to Mayor and Council's direction, staff prepared a draft text amendment that would allow helipads as an accessory use to major medical services in all zones in which major medical services are currently permitted and through special exception in those zones where major medical uses are allowed through special exception. The proposed amendment would impose two use-specific standards: (1) the primary land use shall be a hospital licensed by the State of Arizona as a general or special hospital with a minimum of 50 beds; and (2) the helipad shall comply with all applicable FAA regulations. These proposed use-specific standards are designed to limit this accessory use to hospitals and not the full range of uses that fall under major medical services such as psychiatric hospitals and detoxification centers, and to ensure that the helipads employ widely accepted standards to protect public safety in their operations.

Staff believes that this amendment will support the City's existing hospitals in continuing to meet public safety needs, and provide an option for any new hospitals being developed to include a helipad, part of the essential infrastructure for hospitals providing emergency medical care.

Since the Planning Commission study session, a small change has been made to the proposed text amendment to note that helipads would be allowed through a Zoning Examiner special exception in R-2 and R-3 districts.

**Plan Tucson Consideration(s)** – This item is related to the Element of Public Safety. Specifically, this item is supported by the following policy:

*PS 2 – Maintain high quality, efficient, and cost effective fire and hazardous material response and emergency medical services.*

**Attachments:**

- A – Proposed amendment to the City of Tucson Unified Development Code
- B – Examples of relevant code from other jurisdictions