



PLANNING COMMISSION

Planning and Development Services Department • P.O. Box 27210 • Tucson, AZ 85726-7210

DATE: October 5, 2011

TO: Planning Commission 

FROM: Ernie Duarte, Executive Secretary

SUBJECT: West University Neighborhood Plan and
University Area Plan Amendments, PA-11-01
West University Transition Area – Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)
Study Session (Ward 6)

Issue: This plan amendment has been directed by the Mayor and Council, who have made it clear that development along the 3.9 mile modern streetcar route needs to be supportive of this new transit infrastructure investment. Further, land use policy in the streetcar focus area should be developed to create a transit-oriented area that has a mix of uses, is multi-modal, and supports transit ridership. On June 28, 2011, the Mayor and Council initiated a plan amendment for the West University Transition Area to modify land use policies to facilitate transit-oriented development.

After the plan amendment is adopted, it is anticipated that the Mayor and Council will initiate a rezoning of the pertinent area to an urban overlay district (UOD). The UOD will offer a zoning option to property owners who intend to design their projects in accordance with the heights, uses, and design guidelines spelled out in the draft Transition Area Policies.

Campus Acquisitions, a Chicago-based company, met with Planning and Development Services Department (PDSD) staff and expressed interest in developing a significant multi-story, mixed use development in the vicinity of Tyndall Avenue and First Street, within the Transition Area. The company has been working with the Marshall Foundation to expedite this project so that it is ready for the student housing market at the beginning of the 2012 fall semester.

Ward 6 had requested that the company, the Marshall Foundation, and the officers of the West University Neighborhood Association (WUNA) review early proposals for their acceptability as guidelines for future development of the area. Campus Acquisitions has offered to have their architecture consultants (Shepley Bulfinch – Phoenix branch) work with staff to produce graphics, exhibits, and design suggestions for this plan amendment proposal. The consultant assistance has allowed PDSD staff to move in a more expedited fashion to bring this plan amendment forward to the Planning Commission.

Recommendation: Staff recommends the Planning Commission set this Transition Area proposal to amend the West University Neighborhood Plan, and associated policies of the University Area Plan, for public hearing on November 2, 2011.

October 5, 2011

Public Contact: Beginning in early August 2011, there has been a series of meetings between the Marshall Foundation, Campus Acquisitions, WUNA, and staff. Staff has also met with various property owners, and representatives of the University of Arizona (UA), Metropolitan-Pima Alliance, Southern Arizona Homebuilders Association, Tucson Chamber of Commerce, and the Tucson Association of Realtors. On September 19, 2011, staff held a neighborhood meeting for area property owners, residents, and neighborhood associations. Approximately 35 neighbors attended (see Attachment 1, pages 9-12).

BACKGROUND

Transition Area Overview: The Transition Area is located between the University of Arizona (UA) main campus, to the east; and the historic, lower intensity West University residential neighborhood to the west. It is bounded by Euclid Avenue on the west, Speedway Boulevard on the north, Park Avenue on the east, and 6th Street on the south (see Attachments 2 and 3). National Register Historic Districts are to the west, north, east and south (see Attachment 4).

Approximately sixty percent (60%) of the land in the Transition Area is owned by the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) and the Marshall Foundation, which have a long history of working cooperatively on projects in this area. Several parcels south of Speedway Boulevard are owned by various private entities. Two parcels south of Speedway Boulevard are owned by the City of Tucson (see Attachment 5).

Zoning and Historic Preservation. The Transition Area consists of a mix of mostly residential and commercial zoning. It includes portions of two historic districts, the West University National Register Historic District, and the West University local Historic Preservation overlay Zone (HPZ). Approximately one-quarter of the area is within the local HPZ, and zoning in these areas begins with the letter "H" (see Attachment 6). The National Register District designation confers property tax reductions and incentives, at the State and Federal levels. The local HPZ designation includes design guidelines for alterations to exterior appearance; building heights compatible with those of contributing properties nearby; and Mayor and Council approval, after a public hearing, for demolition of contributing properties. Zoning in the Transition Area includes the following:

HR-1, HR-2, HR-3
R-2, R-3
HO-1
HC-1, HC-3
C-1, C-3
HOCR-2

It is important to note that properties owned by ABOR do not have to follow local land use planning and zoning regulations.

Land Use. The Transition Area can roughly be divided into thirds, based on land use (see Attachment 7). The southern third, roughly between 6th and 4th Streets, is a student housing node, and includes a mix of older and newer multi-story dorms. Interior streets are owned by ABOR, and the area has been designed to favor pedestrians.

The middle portion, along University Boulevard, is the Main Gate commercial district. It consists mostly of commercial and office uses, with a few scattered educational and religious uses. Older buildings are on the south side of University Boulevard, while newer buildings, including the Marriott Hotel, the Louise Foucar Marshall Building, and the UA's University Services Building, are on the north side of University Boulevard. The Main Gate and Tyndall parking garages, north and south of University Boulevard, respectively, are part of this Main Gate area.

The northern third, roughly between 2nd Street and Speedway Boulevard, consists of a mix of older commercial, office, and residential uses, with a few educational and cultural uses, including the Arizona Historical Museum, and Tucson's main mosque, the Islamic Center of Tucson. This area also includes the only single-family homes in the Transition Area, at the southeast corner of Speedway Boulevard and Euclid Avenue. These homes are within the local HPZ.

Land Use Plans: The Transition Area is within the bounds of the West University Neighborhood Plan, and the West University Neighborhood Plan is within the bounds of the University Area Plan (see Attachment 1, page 4). Policies in the West University Neighborhood Plan provide the most specific direction for development in the Transition Area. Policies in the University Area Plan must also be considered.

West University Neighborhood Plan (1988). The West University Neighborhood was the first suburban neighborhood north of the Southern Pacific Railroad, and was generally developed between 1900 and 1930. By the 1950's and 1960's, the neighborhood was in decline. During the 1960's and 1970's, many historic buildings and homes were lost to demolition, which spurred an interest in maintaining the neighborhood's historic residential character. It was in this context that the West University Neighborhood Association (WUNA) was formed, in 1978. Since its formation, WUNA has been very active in land use matters affecting the neighborhood. A primary focus has been to preserve the historic, low-density residential character of the area west of Euclid; another focus has been to coordinate with the UA regarding UA interests in the neighborhood.

In creating a TOD area, the following policies have been the most problematic:

- maximum building height of 40 feet;
- maximum residential density of 40 residences per acre;
- maintain existing commercial uses (i.e., existing commercial zoning);
- residentially-scaled office uses (maximum building height of 16 feet); and
- lack of policies and design guidelines that promote transit-oriented development

University Area Plan (1989). This is a policy-based plan in that there is no conceptual land use map. Consistent with the standard land use plan hierarchy, where the policies of the University Area Plan conflict or are inconsistent with the policies in the West University Neighborhood Plan, the policies of the neighborhood plan shall apply.

Plan goals recognize the nature and potential of the UA and its immediate surroundings as a relatively compact, pedestrian-oriented regional activity center, and promote strengthening the identity and quality of the UA area consistent with City-wide and neighborhood goals. The plan identifies the Main Gate area as a pedestrian commercial district. Within these districts, policies support the consolidation of adjacent development parcels to provide integrated circulation and access; and encourage activities that support the continued vitality of the district. These policies are consistent with the proposed TOD design guidelines.

In creating a TOD area, the following policy has been the most problematic:

- new residential and mixed-use development at a density of 7 residences per acre or more must have vehicular access to a major street (i.e., an arterial or collector street)

General Plan (2001). The General Plan designates the UA as a major educational activity center, and has the strongest policy language promoting the integration of residential and non-residential uses in and near regional activity centers. Policies promote residential development at densities that complement the size and intensity of the activity center, while providing transitions to lower-density residential development. Urban-character housing (15 or more residences per acre) is supported adjacent to major activity centers to provide market support for the activity center, promote the use of alternative modes of transportation, and encourage infill of vacant or underutilized parcels. Other policies promote land use, transportation, and urban design improvements that would link downtown with Fourth Avenue, the Warehouse District, and the UA.

Community character and design policies require that all new development incorporate quality in design. Features that enhance the overall function and visual quality of the street, adjacent properties, and the community are encouraged.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Mayor and Council Direction: The Mayor and Council directed staff to amend the Transition Area policies of the West University Neighborhood Plan, and any supplemental policies of the University Area Plan. The purpose is to continue to prepare property along the modern streetcar route for transit-oriented development.

There will be two streetcar stations directly affecting this area. The TOD term refers to a land use pattern that is designed to maximize access to public transportation and multi-modal options, and often incorporates design and land use features to encourage more pedestrians, bicycle use, and transit ridership.

The proposed amendments will modify the Transition Area policies to facilitate transit-oriented development in this area. The modified policies will focus on land use plan designations, building heights, and design elements so that they are more in accordance with transit-oriented development.

Current Policy Summary: The policies affecting this area were developed in the late 1980's and early 1990's, and were not focused on a streetcar scenario. For any rezoning, building height is restricted to 40 feet, and density is capped at 40 residences per acre. Any rezoning to medium or higher density residential uses (7 residences per acre or more) requires access to a major street. At the same time, the University Area Plan envisions a pedestrian commercial district that generally supports the current TOD proposal. Recently, several amendments in the Transition Area involved building height and density policies, and were approved with little opposition.

Recommended Transit-Oriented Development Policy: The focus of the new policy is to encourage development that supports streetcar ridership and other multi-modal options. In addition, the area's development should continue the improvements initiated by the Marshall Foundation's Main Gate development, by fostering a comfortable pedestrian environment. The proposal encourages taller buildings, a mix of residential and supportive non-residential uses, and streetscapes that illustrate the best practices of urban design. Ultimately, the goal is to follow the TOD plan amendments with a Mayor and Council initiation of an urban overlay district that would allow a zoning option to develop a multi-modal environment that includes the modern streetcar. Below is a description of the key components of the proposed Transition Area policy.

Transition Area Policy Summary: The proposed Transition Area policies, maps, and design guidelines are provided in Attachment 8.

Land Use Designations. Map 1 of Attachment 8 shows three areas: Area 1 is mainly north of Second Street; Area 2 is mainly along University Boulevard; and Area 3 includes all ABOR properties in the southern third of the Transition Area, as well as ABOR properties north of University Boulevard. Development in Areas 1 and 2 will abide by policies on infill uses, building height, massing, and urban design guidelines; it is encouraged that development in Area 3 do the same.

Area 1 – The main TOD Area is divided into three subareas. In reviewing this area and discussing it at the September 19, 2011 neighborhood meeting and the September 21, 2011 Planning Commission meeting, it appears that Subareas A and B are considered to be proposed in a way that there is some consensus on the building height, land uses and design.

- *Subarea A* (generally north of Second Street and west of Park Avenue) – This subarea allows the greatest building height, including 13- and 14-story buildings. It would also allow all of the infill uses described in the TOD Use Policy. Further, if a property used the urban overlay district zoning option, it would be subject to design standards based on the proposal's design guidelines.
- *Subarea B* (generally south of Second Street and west of Park Avenue) – There is consensus on building heights, land uses and design. It is mostly developed. The 2009 plan amendment that allowed a 14- story building at the southeast corner of 2nd Street and Tyndall Avenue would be part of the policies for this subarea.
- *Subarea C* (generally at the southeast corner of Speedway Boulevard and Euclid Avenue) - It was presented at the September 19, 2011 neighborhood meeting that this Subarea would not change from the current Transition Area policy, which calls for residentially-scaled offices and currently allowed residential uses. This policy would allow sixteen-foot tall office buildings, or the re-use of the historic bungalows; or the property could hypothetically be developed with the current zoning for residential uses, which is subject to special height restrictions of the historic preservation overlay zone.

Several persons at the meeting addressed this subarea. There was concern that the tall buildings in Subarea A would cast shadows on the area, and that Subarea A buildings would be intrusive into the current character of this area, causing privacy intrusion.

Other property owners in Subarea C felt that it should be an active part of TOD Area 1, and that multi-story buildings should be allowed. Further, they stated that the current bungalows at the southeast corner of Speedway Boulevard and Euclid Avenue do not make a good entry statement to the UA campus. To them, this plan amendment offers an opportunity to provide a gateway entry befitting to the University area.

The Planning Commission on September 21 requested that staff present an option for Subarea C, showing a TOD area with 4 and 6 story buildings, and allowing the TOD uses that would be allowed in the other Area 1 Sub-Areas (i.e., in the TOD Area).

The Draft Transition Area Policy includes two options for Subarea C:

- Option 1 is for a residentially-scaled residential office area, as per the existing land use plan;
- Option 2 is for a TOD area with 4- and 6-story buildings.

Whichever option is adopted, the Urban Overlay District would then allow a zoning option based on the plan amendment policies.

Area 2 - This area mainly represents the pedestrian commercial Main Gate district. Building heights will remain what they are under existing zoning. It has a 40-foot building height rezoning option. The portion of the area nearest to Euclid Avenue has some contributing historic structures that are being reused as commercial buildings.

Area 3 - This area is the Arizona Board of Regents property. Its uses are educational, cultural, and residential. The proposed policy will encourage ABOR to support the urban design best practices and work cooperatively to address development issues in the surrounding area.

Building Height. The building height policy includes a Building and Massing Plan that shows a potential build-out scenario for taller buildings concentrated at the southwest corner of Park Avenue and Speedway Boulevard. The plan amendment is meant to set the dimensional parameters of infill development in this northern part of the Transition Area. The design guidelines will address the more refined details of the buildings' architecture, the streetscape, and other associated design and development issues.

Land Uses. Land uses encouraged in the Transition Area are infill uses that fit well into a pedestrian area. They include restaurants, educational and residential uses, offices, theaters, micro-breweries, markets, and other uses that serve a pedestrian and transit environs.

Design Guidelines. The overall focus of the guidelines is to create an urban neighborhood with a multi-modal emphasis that is comfortable for pedestrians. A streetscape design guideline addresses sidewalks, permeable building surfaces, entrances, setbacks, shade, street corners, open space, and landscaping. An architectural design guideline addresses facades and solar heat gain. Other guidelines address parking, service areas, and access management. The intent of the guidelines is to begin to set up the design review process for the urban overlay district (see Attachment 8).

Transportation Study: At the September 19 neighborhood meeting and the September 21 Planning Commission meeting, the impact of more urban development on the transportation system was mentioned as an issue that must be resolved. There are pedestrian, congestion, and neighborhood intrusion issues that need to be considered. Staff will recommend that a transportation study be done to identify the problems and potential solutions to transportation issues being brought up.

Public Submittals: Information submitted by the public is included as Attachment 9.

CONCLUSION

The Mayor and Council initiated a Transition Area plan amendment on June 28, 2011, to have a land use policy that supports the City's investment in the modern streetcar. There have been numerous meetings with the public about this plan amendment. The proposal intends to facilitate transit-oriented development through policies that address building height, land uses and design guidelines. The ultimate outcome of the plan amendment will be an urban overlay district that will provide a transit-oriented zoning option. Staff recommends the plan amendment be set for public hearing on November 2, 2011.

Ernie Duarte:JM and JH/jh

- Attachments:
- 1 – Plan Amendment Initiation Package
 - 2 – Linked Activity Nodes (location map)
 - 3 – West University Transition Area (location map)
 - 4 – West University Historic Districts
 - 5 – Property Ownership
 - 6 – Zoning Map
 - 7 – Land Use Map
 - 8 – Proposed Transition Area Policies
 - 9 – Public Submittals