

Zoning for Dollar\$

And so it begins, again. It's summer. As most of us discovered long ago, it is also the perfect time to lay the groundwork for any plan or project that, in all likelihood, would be viewed as undesirable by most residents. Unfortunately, many of our residents are elsewhere during the hot season. Although there are less people to stir up, I hope the rest of us prove them wrong.

To date, popular opinion has been only modestly successful in deterring town government from initiating Carefree character-altering decisions. A minor victory last year prevented a town core zoning change, one that would have allowed building heights in excess of 60 feet. In this period of declining sales tax revenue and growing government expenses, an old favorite gets dusted off and a new game of 'Zoning for Dollars' hits the planning table in Town hall. Coming to that table soon will be a land development proposal to convert 35 pristine acres of our Sonoran Desert landscape from R-43, low density Residential (one home per acre), to a Residential Unit Plan of Development (RUPD) community with 118 home sites. That property had previously been platted for 31 homes several years ago.

In March of 2016 the Town approved the Eastwood development on 9+ acres of land between Pima Norte and the currently proposed StageCreek development (across from SkyRanch & Airpark). To do so they rezoned two separate parcels of land. The first small parcel had been zoned Garden Office and a larger parcel was R-43. The parcels were combined and then up-zoned as an RUPD allowing up to 7 homes per acre. 39 homes can generate more construction revenue than seven 1-acre properties. At the time residents were assured that the up-zoning was beneficial because Eastwood would serve as a 'buffer' between the light commercial Garden Office to the east (Pima & Cave Creek Roads) and one 35-acre R-43 low density parcel *and* a second 40-acre R-70 very low-density parcel (1 home per 2 acres) residential land to the west. That buffer, we were told, was consistent with our General Plan Land Use policy. We now face the prospect of another up-zoning move, this time the stakes are raised to 118 homes rather than the 31 originally planned on the first 35-acre plat. The only thing consistent here is the willingness of Town Hall to play the Zoning for Dollars game.

The current round of the game may not end with StageCreek. The two Ed Lewis properties had already been granted special height treatment via a zoning text amendment and development agreement years ago, yet they remain undeveloped. The most recent proposal by Mr. Lewis for the luxury Easy Street Condos was withdrawn in November of 2016. None of us should be surprised to learn that more concessions will likely be granted, by the stroke of a pen, to attract a new buyer/developer to those parcels. Keep in mind that Zoning for Dollars only benefits the town treasury in the short term by increasing one-time revenue from construction taxes & fees. The game also benefits the potential developer who can build more or higher units. When the one-time burst of income ends, and if all the added rooftops or units do not also generate consistent, increased sales tax from their occupants, *Carefree's desert character will still be altered forever*; that is not a win for anyone. A town is its people.

Zoning for Dollars does nothing to enhance or even maintain the character and charm of Carefree for its residents.

John Traynor, Carefree