

DATE ISSUED: December 6, 2006 REPORT NO. PC-06-306

ATTENTION: Planning Commission
Agenda of December 14, 2006

SUBJECT: Initiation of an Amendment to the Clairemont Mesa Community Plan and the Progress Guide and General Plan to remove a 1.68-acre site from the “Community Core – Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone (CPIOZ) Type B” and redesignate the site from Community Center Commercial to a new mixed-use designation (up to 29 du/ac).

OWNER/
APPLICANT: Martin D. Wilson (Attachment 1)

SUMMARY:

Issues – Should the Planning Commission INITIATE an amendment to the Clairemont Mesa Community Plan and the Progress Guide and General Plan, pursuant to Municipal Code Section 122.0103, to remove a 1.68-acre site from the Community Core (CPIOZ) Type B and redesignate the site from Community Center Commercial to a new mixed-use designation (up to 29 du/ac)?

Mayor’s Recommendation – DENY THE INITIATION REQUEST and maintain the existing Community Core (CPIOZ) Type B overlay and the existing Community Center Commercial designation.

Community Planning Group Recommendation – On November 21, 2006, the Clairemont Mesa Planning Committee voted 8-1-1 to recommend denial of the initiation request (Minutes not yet available).

Environmental Impact – If initiated, the proposed plan amendment and future discretionary actions will be subject to environmental review.

Fiscal Impact – If the amendment is initiated, processing costs would be paid for by the applicant.

Housing Affordability Impact – If initiated, the proposed general/community plan amendment to remove 1.68 acres of land from the Community Core, CPIOZ, Type B, and redesignate to a new mixed-use designation (up to 29 du/ac) would allow for up to 49 dwelling units on the site where none are currently allowed. The applicant has indicated that the inclusionary housing requirements will be met on-site.

This initiation request does not constitute an endorsement of the proposed project. If initiated, a staff recommendation will be developed once the project has been fully analyzed. Approval of this action would allow the staff analysis to proceed.

BACKGROUND

The subject property is a 1.68 acre site located at 5937 Balboa Avenue in the Clairemont Mesa Community Planning Area (Attachment 2). The Clairemont Mesa Community Planning Area is located in the central western portion of the City of San Diego, east of Interstate 5, south of State Route 52, west of Interstate 805, and north of Interstate 8, approximately 6 miles north of downtown San Diego. Adjacent communities include University to the north, Kearny Mesa to the east, Linda Vista to the south, and La Jolla, Pacific Beach, and Mission Bay Park to the west.

The subject site is within an existing commercial retail shopping center that has been developed over the last forty years. Specifically, the site is located within an area designated as the Community Core in the Clairemont Mesa Community Plan. The Community Core is located near the intersection of Genesee Avenue and Balboa Avenue (Attachment 3). The Community Core area encompasses approximately 105 acres, consisting of Genesee Plaza and Balboa Mesa shopping centers; Balboa Crest (a commercial strip center); and Balboa Towers (a medical office development).

The subject site currently contains approximately 20,221 square feet of commercial retail uses, which include a travel agency, telecommunications vendor, dentist office, real estate office, salon, computer store, grocery market, as well as three restaurants (Attachment 4). The property is immediately surrounded by auto-oriented commercial services and a strip commercial center to the north; strip commercial retail, service and restaurant uses to the west; office uses to the south; and restaurant and office uses to the east (Attachment 4).

The applicant has indicated a desire to develop the subject property with the addition of 17 pre-fabricated residential apartment units above the existing commercial development, as well as an additional approximate 2,100 square feet of commercial space and the construction of 30 garages in the rear of the existing building.

The Community Core is currently in relatively poor condition, underutilized with one story buildings surrounded and separated by excess parking and vacant land (Attachment 4). Two projects were recently approved within the Community Core (Genesee Plaza Expansion and Balboa Mesa Expansion), which include façade improvements and building renovations to many of the existing commercial structures within the Community Core, as well as improved pedestrian and vehicular circulation. These proposed improvements are the result of the comprehensive architectural and site design guidelines of the CPIOZ, Type B Overlay Zone

which applies to the entire Community Core. This Overlay Zone was adopted specifically for the Community Core in order to address the lack of a pedestrian environment in the Community Core area, including direct access to adjacent residential neighborhoods. The Clairemont Mesa Community Plan contains the following policy statement in regards to the Community Core: “Commercial uses only should be permitted in the community core. Residential land uses should not be permitted in order to preserve the core as the commercial center of the community” (pg. 44). The applicant’s proposed community plan amendment requests removal from CPIOZ so that the prohibition of a residential land use would not apply.

In addition to the subject site’s location within the Community Core, the site’s location along Balboa Avenue is also a significant factor. Balboa Avenue was a State highway in 1996 when State legislators formed the Balboa Avenue Citizens Advisory Committee (BACAC) for community involvement in its upgrade. Soon after, the State relinquished the highway to the City of San Diego to be a local street. The City of San Diego and the BACAC worked together to form a vision of a more pedestrian-friendly corridor with increased pedestrian connectivity. On September 12, 2005, the City Council adopted the Balboa Avenue Revitalization Action Program (RAP) that identifies desired enhancements to this corridor, and specifically to the Community Core.

Other Community Plan Amendments in Clairemont Mesa

Coastal Trailer Villas – an amendment is proposed that will allow for the construction of approximately 190 multi-family homes on a site currently designated as Mobile Home Park at 1579 Morena Boulevard. (Attachment 5)

DISCUSSION

Before a community plan amendment can be initiated, Section 122.0104 of the Municipal Code requires that any one of three initial criteria or all four supplemental criteria specified in the code must be met. The City Planning and Community Investment Department does not believe that any of the following three initial criteria can be met:

- (1) The amendment is appropriate due to a mapping or textual error or omission made when the original land use plan or local coastal program was adopted or during subsequent amendments;**
- (2) Denial of initiation would jeopardize the public health, safety or general welfare;**
- (3) The amendment is appropriate due to a material change in circumstances since the adoption of a land use plan or local coastal program whereby denial of initiation would result in a hardship to the applicant by denying any reasonable use of the subject real property.**

Additionally, the City Planning and Community Investment Department does not believe that all of the following four supplemental criteria can be met:

(1) The proposed land use plan amendment is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Clairemont Mesa Community Plan.

While both the Balboa Avenue RAP and the Strategic Framework Element of the General Plan do provide policies supporting mixed-use development within the Community Core, the emphasis is on the development of a comprehensive Neighborhood Village Center, as identified on the City of Villages Opportunity Areas Map. The proposed amendment only addresses a 1.68-acre site, rather than the entire 105-acre Community Core. The Clairemont Mesa Community Plan recommends that no residential land uses be permitted within the Community Core in order to preserve the core as the commercial center of the community. The proposed land use plan amendment is in direct conflict with this policy statement. A change to this language in the Community Plan would require a more comprehensive approach to considering the addition of a residential component within the Community Core and would require an analysis that includes all 105 acres. As the current amendment proposal only addresses a small portion of the overall Community Core, it would further isolate the site from adjacent land uses with the proposal to remove the site from the CPIOZ, Type B Overlay Zone and the Community Core designation, which are intended to integrate the planning and development of all of the properties within the Core.

(2) The proposed land use plan amendment appears to offer a public benefit to the community or City.

While the proposed amendment would benefit the community by providing housing at a time when the City of San Diego has declared a housing state of emergency, the location of the proposed housing within a poorly-maintained commercial-only center, having no residential amenities is considered by Staff not to be an appropriate situation. The proposed land use plan amendment does not incorporate the retrofitting of the site or a re-design of the commercial center to accommodate residential uses or activities. The immediate site contains wide drive isles, no landscaping, no internal pedestrian sidewalk system linking the building to any others within the Core or to the adjacent street, no open space, and no recreational amenities.

(3) Public services appear to be available to serve the proposed change in density or intensity of use.

All needed public services (water, sewer) are available as the Clairemont Mesa community is an urbanized community. Full analysis of public services and facilities (schools, fire stations, police stations, libraries, parks, etc.) would need to be conducted with the review of the community plan amendment, if initiated. The Public Facilities Financing Plan for the Clairemont Mesa community would need to

be evaluated to determine whether it would need to be amended to address facilities needs generated by the proposed land use change.

(4) City staff is available to process the proposed land use plan amendment without any work being deferred on General Fund supported programs or ongoing plan updates.

Staff is available to process the plan amendment request without delaying general fund programs or ongoing plan updates, as the City Planning and Community Investment Department's work program includes staff time for non-general fund development projects. However, delays in processing the plan amendment could occur based on staff levels and workload. The costs associated with processing this amendment will be paid for by the applicant.

CONCLUSION

As outlined above, the City Planning and Community Investment Department does not believe that the proposed general/community plan amendment meets all four of the supplemental criteria, as described in Municipal Code Section 122.0104; therefore, staff recommends this amendment process not be initiated.

If the Planning Commission does support the initiation, the following land use issues, as well as others that may be identified, will be analyzed and evaluated through the general/community plan amendment review process:

- The appropriate land use designation and density range for the site.
- Feasibility of mixed-use development on this site.
- Determination of the appropriate scale/scope of the proposed amendment, in relation to the overall Community Core.
- Compatibility of new development with existing and planned uses in the project vicinity.
- Application of the Balboa Avenue RAP policies and recommendations.
- Application of the CPIOZ Community Core Architectural and Site Design Guidelines.
- Provision of pedestrian amenities and streetscape improvements.
- Provision of recreational amenities to serve future residents.
- The creation of appropriate design guidelines for the proposed new mixed-use land use designation.
- Analysis of pedestrian connections between uses within the project site and from the site to the adjacent Community Core, public streets and transit stops.
- Analysis of traffic impacts, including internal circulation throughout the Community Core, as well as connections to Mt. Alifan Drive and Balboa Avenue.
- The adequacy of existing public services and facilities, including schools, parks, fire, police and transit services, to determine whether the additional units proposed would negatively impact the current levels of these services.
- Evaluation of the Clairemont Mesa Facilities Financing Plan to determine whether an update would be necessary, given the proposed additional residential density.

ALTERNATIVES

Approve the initiation request. The Planning Commission would have to determine that all four of the supplemental criteria can be met in order for the community plan amendment initiation to be approved.

Respectfully submitted,

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City Planning and Community Investment

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CW/BS

Attachments:

1. Ownership Disclosure Statement
2. Project Location Map(s)
3. Community Core Location Map (s)
4. Existing Land Uses
5. Map of other Community Plan Amendments