

**DATE ISSUED:** November 24, 2004                      **REPORT NO. PC-04-183**

**ATTENTION:**            **Planning Commission, Agenda of December 2, 2004**

**SUBJECT:**                MESA COMMONS - PROJECT NO. 33812 - PROCESS 5.

**REFERENCE:**            Planning Commission Resolution No. 3382-PC Initiating an Amendment to the College Area Community Plan and the Progress Guide and General Plan (Attachment 5).

**OWNER/  
APPLICANT:**            Carter Reese No. 15 L.P.

**SUMMARY**

**Issue(s):** Should the Planning Commission recommend to the City Council that the City Council approve an application for a General Plan/Community Plan Amendment, Rezone Action, Planned Development Permit, Site Development Permit, Tentative Map and Easement Abandonment for the development of a mixed-use project proposing 52 residential units and 2,833 square-feet of commercial retail space in the College Area Community Planning area?

**Staff Recommendation:**

1.        Recommend the City Council **CERTIFY** Negative Declaration No. 33812; and
2.        Recommend the City Council **APPROVE** Planned Development Permit No. 93412; and
3.        Recommend the City Council **APPROVE** Site Development Permit No. 93413; and
4.        Recommend the City Council **APPROVE** Tentative Map No. 93414; and
5.        Recommend the City Council **APPROVE** Rezone Action No. 93415; and
6.        Recommend the City Council **APPROVE** General/Community Plan Amendment No. 93416; and
7.        Recommend the City Council **APPROVE** Easement Abandonment No. 93417.

**Community Planning Group Recommendation:** On October 13, 2004, the College Area Community Council voted 15-2-0 recommending approval of the project with conditions to provide traffic bollards in order to prevent access to El Cajon Blvd. through the project from Catoctin Drive, a stop sign for vehicles exiting the parking area onto Catoctin Drive, and the addition of a tot lot. These recommendations have been incorporated into the final project design and are discussed in greater detail within this report.

**Environmental Review:** Negative Declaration No. 33812 has been prepared for the project in accordance with State of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines.

**Fiscal Impact:** None. All of the costs associated with processing this application are paid for by the applicant.

**Code Enforcement Impact:** None.

**Housing Impact Statement:** According to the College Area Community Plan, the proposed 2.26-acre project site is comprised of 1.19 acres designated for General Commercial with High-Very High Residential at 45 to 110 dwelling units per acre and 1.07 acres designated form Low Residential at 1 to 10 net residential units per acre. Based on these recommended residential densities, 55 to 142 housing units could potentially be allowed on this site. Changes based on the proposed community plan amendments would reduce the potential yield for the project site from 29 to 70 dwelling units. The project proposes the removal of one single family residence to accommodate a total of 52 units consisting of 47 for-sale units and 5 rental units above commercial. As a result, the net gain of residential units to the College Area community would be 51 units. The project proposes no affordable housing units on or off-site. Instead, the applicant intends to pay an in-lieu fee per the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance.

## **BACKGROUND**

The project site is located at 6456 El Cajon Boulevard within the College Area Community Planning area (Attachment 3). The 2.26-acre site is more or less configured as an “S-shaped” lot with street frontages on both El Cajon Boulevard and Catoctin Drive (Attachment 6). The site includes two separate land use designations and two different underlying zones therefore, development on the property is regulated by both the Land Development Code for Citywide Zoning (RS-1-7) and the Central Urbanized Planned District Ordinance (CU-2-3). The College Area Community Plan designates the site for residential land use on the northwest portion near Catoctin Drive and general commercial with a residential component along the El Cajon Boulevard frontage. The property is currently only partially developed with an older commercial building fronting El Cajon Boulevard which is being used as a place of worship and a single-family home on the Catoctin Drive portion. The remainder of the property, with the exception of a paved parking lot, is vacant land. The neighborhood surrounding the project site includes a variety of land uses including a private school site, single and multi-family residential

development, to the north, east and west, and commercial service and retail development to the south along the El Cajon Boulevard commercial corridor.

On May 29, 2003, the Planning Commission initiated an amendment to the College Area Community Plan and the Progress Guide and General Plan to re-designate the 2.26-acre site from General Commercial and Very High Residential density to General Commercial and Medium and Medium-High Residential density and Low Residential to Low-Medium Residential density. In addition to analyzing the project within the context of the College Area Community Plan, the Planning Commission directed City staff to address issues concerning access to the adjacent Aseltine School site and the Montezuma Neighborhood Park, the feasibility of meeting recommended plan densities and an evaluation of not reducing residential densities for the proposed project along the El Cajon frontage as it relates to the commercial corridor. These issues are discussed in greater detail in the General/Community Plan Amendment Analysis (Attachment 5).

In addition to the General/Community Plan Amendment and Rezone, the project is requesting several other discretionary actions. The application is requesting a Site Development Permit to combine and consolidate the existing lots for the purpose of the development, a Planned Development Permit to allow deviations from the development regulations of the Land Development Code and the Central Urbanized Planned District Ordinance, an Easement Abandonment, and a Tentative Map to sell the individual condominium units. These actions are also discussed in greater detail within this report.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Project Description:**

The Mesa Commons project proposes a mixed-use development consisting of 52 residential units and 2,833 square-feet of commercial retail space. The project includes a serpentine private drive through the S-shaped lot with ingress and egress from either El Cajon Boulevard or Catoctin Drive. The residential component includes 16 row homes, 31 condominium units and five rental units. The commercial component provides 2,833 square-feet of retail space that would front El Cajon Boulevard.

The row home element of the proposed project includes four groupings of three-story buildings with four units each. The units are all accessed from Catoctin Drive and each unit has a two-car garage fronting the private drive. The row home design includes a 1,733 square-foot model and a slightly smaller 1,664 square-foot model. Both designs include three bedrooms, three bathrooms and a family/bonus room as well as common living and dining areas off the kitchen. The row homes have staggered setbacks and private yards and generally provide a compatible and transitional land use between the older single-family neighborhood to the north and the multi-family and commercial land use to the east, west and south.

The condominium element of the proposed project is designed as a three-story structure over a subterranean parking garage accessed via the private drive from El Cajon Boulevard. The 31-

unit condominium component is best described as stacked flats or townhomes with unit sizes ranging between 1,220 square-feet to 1,832 square-feet. Designs include two and three bedroom models with one and two-story units. Each unit includes at least one private balcony and many of the units have small private exterior courtyards. The residential land use and density would be consistent with the proposed RM-1-2 zone and the bulk and scale of the proposed building is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

The mixed-use commercial/residential element of the proposed project includes 2,833 square-feet of retail space fronting El Cajon Boulevard with five residential rental units located on the second floor of the structure. The five apartment units are each 793 square-feet with two-bedrooms and one bathroom. Each unit includes an exterior private balcony and assigned off-street parking. The commercial element is conceptually illustrated as four separate retail spaces however one or more retailers could occupy the area. Off-street parking for the commercial space is provided behind the building so as to not to be visible from the street frontage. The building elevation fronting El Cajon Boulevard is designed to include visual interest and a pedestrian scale with several off-setting planes, decorative elements and arched storefront doors and window transparencies. The mixed-use commercial/residential element does not adversely affect the land use designation of the College Area Community Plan and provides a compatible transition to the higher density residential portion of the project.

### **Community Plan Analysis:**

According to the College Area Community Plan, there are two different land use designations applied to the property. The southern portion of the site, which is approximately 1.19 acres, is designated for General Commercial with High to Very High Residential at 45 to 110 dwelling units per acre emphasizing mixed-use development. Under the current land use designation, this portion of the site could be developed with 54 to 131 dwelling units along El Cajon Boulevard which is a major east-west transportation corridor serving both the College Area and Mid-City communities. The northern portion of the site along Catoctin Drive, which is approximately 1.07 acres, is designated for Low Residential at 1 to 10 dwelling units per acre and emphasizes residential housing that is single-family in nature. Under the existing land use designation, this portion of the project site could be developed with 1 to 11 single-family detached units.

The applicant has requested that the property be redesignated from General Commercial with High to Very High Residential at 45 to 110 dwelling units per acre to General Commercial with Medium to Medium High Residential at 15 to 45 dwelling units per acre along the El Cajon Boulevard portion of the site. Along the Catoctin Drive portion of the site, the applicant is requesting that the Low Residential at 1 to 10 dwelling units per acre to Low to Medium Residential at 10 to 15 dwelling units per acre. This redesignation would allow for construction of the 52-unit mixed-use project being proposed on-site.

The redesignation is being requested due to the development requirements set forth for the RS-1-7 Land Development Code zone, which do not allow an attached housing product. Further, the proposed project does not meet the minimum density due to the irregular lot shape along El

Cajon Boulevard and therefore is requesting a plan amendment and rezone for this portion of the project as well.

A comprehensive analysis of the land use issues and project impacts has been provided by the Planning Department staff (Attachment 5). The analysis focused on elements of the College Area Community Plan as well as the land use issues identified by the Planning Commission as part of the May 29, 2003, Community Plan Initiation. The analysis included the following issues:

- Compatibility with the goals and objectives of the Progress Guide and General Plan's Strategic Framework Element and the Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines.
- Comparison of current land use and zoning designations with proposed land use and zoning designations and the feasibility of meeting recommended densities for the proposed project site.
- Impacts on the community circulation system.
- Housing availability and affordability.
- Pedestrian amenities and streetscape improvements associated with new residential and commercial structures.
- Access to Montezuma Neighborhood Park and impacts to park and open space resources in the community.
- Adequacy of public facilities to service additional residential development within the community.
- Impacts to surrounding single-family neighborhood character
- Evaluation of the possibility of not reducing density for the proposed project along El Cajon Boulevard with respect to the densities along the El Cajon Boulevard corridor.

Based on the comprehensive analysis, staff has determined that the proposed General/Community Plan Amendment and Rezone action would not adversely impact the overall goals and recommendations of the community plan.

**Environmental Analysis:**

An Initial Study was conducted which determined that the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the environment and that an Environmental Impact Report would not be

required. The following environmental issues were considered during the environmental review of this project and determined not to be significant: land use, human health and safety, geology/soils, biological resources, noise, and water quality.

Because there are no adverse significant environmental impacts, and no environmental mitigation was required Negative Declaration No. 6199 was prepared for this project. The Negative Declaration fulfills the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for review.

### **Project-Related Issues:**

#### Discretionary Permits

The Mesa Commons project is requesting several discretionary approvals in order to develop the site with the proposed residential densities and mix of housing types. In addition to the General/Community plan Amendment and Rezone from RS-1-7 to RM-1-2, the application is requesting a Planned Development Permit, Site Development Permit, Tentative Map and an Easement Abandonment.

The Site Development Permit is required pursuant to Section 126.0502(b)(4) of the Land Development Code because the project exceeds the established threshold for multi-family development of four units in the RM-1-2 Zone when the project combines existing lots in order to provide the development area.

The Planned Development Permit is required pursuant to Section 126.0602(b)(1) of the Land Development Code because the project is requesting deviations to the development regulations of the underlying zone. The project proposes deviations to the minimum front yard setback and maximum height limit in the RM-1-2 Zone, and deviations to the minimum side and rear yard setbacks in the CU-2-3 Zone. The project also proposes minor deviations to general development regulations including the inclusion of a tandem parking space, required bicycle spaces and right-of-way width. Staff has reviewed and considered each of the requested deviations and determined that they are minor in scope, provide for a superior overall project and that the project as a whole is consistent with the purpose and intent of the RM-1-2 and CU-2-3 Zones.

The Tentative Map is required to develop the project as condominiums and permit the sale of the individual units. This action would not apply to the five rental units developed in conjunction with the commercial component. The Easement Abandonment action is required because an existing 8-inch public sewer main traverses this property and conveys offsite flow. The project proposes to abandon and relocate the existing on-site public sewer facilities. In addition to the easement abandonment, the project is dedicating and also vacating portions of the public right-of-way along El Cajon Boulevard and Catocin Drive in order to provide uniform curb-to-property line widths with adjacent parcels and comply with current right-of-way widths established by the Street Design Manual. These actions are being executed as apart of the mapping process.

#### Undergrounding Waiver Request

San Diego Municipal Code Section 144.0240 allows the subdivider to apply for a waiver from the requirement to underground the existing overhead utilities within the boundary of the subdivision or within the abutting public rights of way. City staff has determined the undergrounding waiver request qualifies under the guidelines of Council Policy 600-25, *Underground Conversion of Utility Lines at the Developer's Expense*, in that the conversion is a requirement of a condominium conversion of an existing development and the conversion involves a short span of overhead facilities less than a full block in length and the conversion would not represent a logical extension to an undergrounding facility. The applicant would be required to underground any new service run to any new or proposed structures within the subdivision per Condition No. 6 of the draft Tentative Map resolution (Attachment 10).

The neighborhood currently contains power poles and overhead utility lines within the rights-of-way across the street on the south side of El Cajon Boulevard and across the street on the north side of Catoctin opposite the project site. There are no existing power poles within the right-of-way adjacent to this property and the drop lines servicing the existing commercial and residential structures are attached to the overhead wires mid-span. The Citywide Underground Conversion Program Master Plan indicates that the project is located in Residential District 7G. The allocation year for funding of this area has not yet been determined by Council District 7 (Attachment 19)

#### Community Planning Group

The College Area Community Council voted 15-2-0 recommending approval of the project. Included in the motion to approve the project, the Community Council provided three specific conditions that they wanted applied to the site design to address vehicular circulation through and from the site. In response, traffic bollards have been included at the midway point of the driveway to preclude access to El Cajon Blvd. through the project from Catoctin Drive in order to prevent "cut through" traffic that the Council viewed as a potential hazard. Additionally, a stop sign has been included for vehicles exiting the project parking area on to Catoctin Drive. Finally, the Community Council requested the provision of a tot lot or other active outdoor recreation area. All of these recommendations have been incorporated into the final project design.

#### **Critical Project Features to Consider During Substantial Conformance Review**

Significant design features considered as a part of the project review included the overall site plan and physical layout of the site. Any request for substantial conformance should not increase the residential density for the area developed with row home style units as this area was considered as a suitable transition between existing single-family development and the mixed-use residential and commercial elements. Nor should any proposed modification decrease the commercial area or the number of rental units provided. Design modifications should not increase the degree of non-conformity to the approved deviations relative to minimum setbacks and structural height. Any revision to the site plan should not affect the vehicle and pedestrian circulation or the landscape materials and locations including enhanced paving elements.

**Conclusion:**

The Mesa Commons project proposes a mixed-use residential and commercial development with an assortment of housing types and unit sizes. The project is located within the core of the College Area community on a site that includes both vacant undeveloped land and two existing structures in various states of decline and disrepair. The project proposes an amendment to the College Area Community Plan and a Rezone action to allow for the mix of residential unit types and the proposed densities. The residential element is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood that includes significant elements of both single-family and multi-family development, while the proposed commercial component is consistent with existing development and proposed land use along the El Cajon Boulevard corridor.

The project has been reviewed in accordance with all applicable development regulations including the Land Development Code, Central Urbanized Planned District Ordinance, Progress Guide and General Plan, College Area Community Plan, the Subdivision Map Act and the California Environmental Quality Act. Staff has considered the issues and determined the project complies with the applicable development regulations and would be consistent with the purpose and intent of the underlying zone. Further, staff has analyzed the proposed General/Community Plan Amendment and concluded the project would not adversely impact the overall goals and recommendations of the College Area Community Plan. Staff believes the proposed mixed-use infill project is well designed and overall would be an asset to the neighborhood. Therefore, staff has provided the required findings to affirm the project and recommends that the Planning Commission forward this application to the City Council with a recommendation to approve the project.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Recommend that the City Council **Approve** Planned Development Permit No. 93412; Site Development Permit No. 93413; Tentative Map No. 93414; Rezone Action No. 93415; General/Community Plan Amendment No. 93416; and Easement Abandonment No. 93417, **with modifications**; or
2. Recommend that the City Council **Deny** Planned Development Permit No. 93412; Site Development Permit No. 93413; Tentative Map No. 93414; Rezone Action No. 93415; General/Community Plan Amendment No. 93416; and Easement Abandonment No. 93417, **if the findings required to approve the project cannot be affirmed.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

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**Marcela Escobar-Eck**  
**Deputy Director, Project Management Division**

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**John P. Hooper**  
**Development Project Manager**



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**Betsy McCullough**  
**Deputy Director**  
**Planning Department**

HALBERT/JPH

Attachments:

1. Aerial Photograph
2. Community Plan Land Use Map
3. Project Location Map
4. Project Data Sheet
5. Initiation Resolution and Community Plan Analysis
6. Project Site Plans and Tentative Map
7. Draft Land Use Plan Graphics
8. Draft Map Conditions and Subdivision Resolution
9. Draft Permit with Conditions
10. Draft Resolution with Findings
11. Draft Community Plan Amendment Resolution
12. Rezone - B Sheet
13. Community Planning Group Recommendation
14. Ownership Disclosure Statement
15. Project Chronology
16. Master Undergrounding Schedule