



CITY OF RIDGECREST

100 West California Avenue
Ridgecrest, CA 93555

MINUTES

MEETING OF THE CITY OF RIDGECREST PLANNING COMMISSION

City Council Chambers

Tuesday, September 25, 2007 at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioners: Chair, Mike Biddlingmeier, Vice-Chair, Jerry Taylor, Commissioners, Lois Beres; Howard Laire, and Nellavan Jeglum

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7.00 p.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. ROLL CALL

Present: Chair Biddlingmeier, Commissioner Beres, Commissioner Jeglum

Absent: Commissioner Laire

Staff Present: City Planner Matthew Alexander, Public Services Director Jim McRea, Economic Development Project Manager Gary Parsons, Administrative Secretary Danielle Valentine

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was moved by Commissioner Jeglum and seconded by Commission Beres to approve the Agenda. The agenda was approved as submitted.

AYES: Biddlingmeier, Jeglum, Beres, Taylor

NAYES: None

ABSENT: Laire

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was moved by Commissioner Jeglum and seconded by Commissioner Taylor to approve the Minutes. The Minutes of 28th August, 2007 were approved as submitted.

AYES: Biddlingmeier, Jeglum, Beres, Taylor

NAYES: None

ABSENT: Laire

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS OF ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA

Commission Jeglum asked to speak. She informed the Commission that it had been brought to her attention that the General Plan amendments and zone changes originally scheduled for the evening's meeting would be postponed until a later date. She went on to say that there are a number of pieces of property north of Ridgecrest Blvd and West of Mahan in the same flight path having the same influences as those properties on the Agenda. Commissioner Jeglum requested that staff look at including these properties in the postponed to be considered concurrently with the other items.

Chair Biddlingmeier after general agreement by the Commissioners gave direction to include said properties in the hearing scheduled for 13th November, 2007.

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

7A. CUP 07-07

Planner Alexander briefed the Commissioners on the request to build a 150 foot cell tower located on the NW corner of Downs St. Planner Alexander provided illustrations showing the proposed 150ft monopole and noted that the project site is currently owned by the Salvation Army and used for parking.

Planner Alexander reported that a concern with the project had only come up that afternoon and apologized for not providing more research time to the Commissioners. Planner Alexander stated that Public Works did not bring this issue to staff's attention when they reviewed the project. He provided a slide showing a master street plan of the site – with the project site outlined in magenta. Planner Alexander explained that according to the master plan a portion of the project area should be dedicated right-of-way for French Avenue. Planner Alexander explained that no-one from Engineering could be present at the meeting that evening and therefore recommended that the item be held over to another evening.

Planner Alexander then asked Economic Development Project Manager Gary Parsons to come forward and talk about cell towers.

Mr. Parsons briefed the Commission on issues associated with cell tower applications and in particular some potential concerns relative to this particular application. He stated that cell towers like the one being proposed typically ended up via sub-leasing adding more antenna and looking a lot less aesthetic. He explained that the unfortunate situation is often that typically a single pole will have additions added along the way for other uses.

Mr. Parsons stated that as his job was to increase the economic vitality of the City he was concerned as he didn't see any new jobs, new sales tax generation coming from this project – therefore he could see no community value associated with the tower as it was his understanding that cell service was adequate. He acknowledged that perhaps the applicant could add further comment.

Mr. Parsons went on to say that he felt it was a question of cell tower design and there were a variety of options noting he was not asking for direction on design but suggesting the Commission consider what type of amenity residents would want to see daily. He provided a slide presentation of alternatives for cell tower design including designs such as a Denny's sign, a cactus, a tree, a flag pole, a clock tower etc.

Commissioner Jeglum asked how tall these options might be.

Mr. Parsons responded that they ranged from 25 feet to 250 feet and that all examples provided were existing towers.

Mr. Parsons summarized saying that aesthetics of the community was essential and whilst the cost for the developer was high he wanted to ask the Commission to consider the design and aesthetics of the pole.

Chair Biddlingmeier opened the floor for comments from Commissioners:

Vice-Chair Taylor stated that he was in favor of continuing the item. His thoughts were that the lower the tower was the less he had to see it. He stated that his only concern was the access issue raised by Planner Alexander and made a general comment that location and design made sense. He added he thought the tower did add value to the city if you looked at the increased coverage indicated by the map provided by the applicant.

Chair Biddlingmeier stated that he agreed with Mr. Parsons that there was the opportunity for Verizon to sub-lease and all of a sudden the structure would not be a monopole. He stated he was in favor of taking a closer look at the project at a later date and asked that Planner Alexander confirm the zoning of the site was commercial – this was confirmed by Planner Alexander.

Chair Biddlingmeier then asked if in GPAC's discussions on land use and infill there was any anticipation that the project site area zoning would change to R-1. He added he thought he had seen a map during GPAC suggesting this change and in that instance the Verizon monopole would end up being in the middle of someone's backyard.

Commissioner Jeglum asked if the street design presented by Planner Alexander was a recorded tract map or is it just a design for streets.

Planner Alexander confirmed that at present the site was big parcels with no streets and that when the property is developed it would be appropriate to develop street design.

Commissioner Jeglum then asked why, at the time the map was recorded, the dedications were not also recorded. She enquired as to how the dedications would now be effected.

Planner Alexander advised that this would be a condition of the Conditional Use Permit.

Planner Alexander then acknowledged that the applicant was present and asked him to speak to the Commission

Ron James of 29/620 Butterfield Way, Tehachapi, briefed the Commission. He introduced himself as being employed by Ridge Communications representing Verizon Wireless for this project.

Mr. James stated that the need for the site was long overdue. He indicated that it was Verizon's intent on doing the necessary improvements for the Tehachapi area. Mr. James explained that there was currently a long distance between the cell sites north of Ridgecrest and South of Ridgecrest – hence the need for the service was critical. Mr. James went on to say that Verizon believed the coverage for customers would be vastly improved as reflected on the map referred to previously. Mr. James made particular reference to the highways – stating that coverage was important for public safety reasons.

Mr. James advised that Verizon was pleased that there had been neither public nor public agency concerns regarding the project – including a review by the Base with a positive response.

Mr. James advised that camouflaged poles are typically found in areas where they blend in with the existing flora – or on a hillside or a mountain top – where the public is not necessarily right next to the facility. He indicated that if a camouflaged pole was used in this instance, rather than blending in the pole would be very conspicuous. Mr. James advised that Verizon had chosen the flush antenna design, a slim-line look so that it would be inconspicuous in the surroundings. He noted that this design was a typical site in cities around the country.

Mr. James said that it may be of interest to the Commission to know that Cal Trans had decided not to go with the tree poles because of maintenance issues saying that they were not wearing well – especially in high wind areas. He added that another thing the Commission may wish to consider in terms of aesthetics was that perhaps a different color would be beneficial.

Mr. James advised that when the Verizon surveyor laid the plans he/she left a 33 foot strip to the west as there was already an indication that there was an easement and Verizon felt they could not put the access road on that easement. He stated that if the facility needed to be moved a bit to the south or to the east that would not be a problem saying that Verizon did not want to conflict with future street development.

Commissioner Jeglum asked if the Salvation Army would still own the property and Verizon lease and Mr. James responded affirmatively.

Mr. Parsons asked Mr. James if the height of the pole was required for coverage for Ridgecrest and Mr. James responded stating that the height was required for the area around the city.

There was further questioning of Mr. James by Mr. Parsons as to the necessity of the 150 foot pole and how it related to Ridgecrest versus the Tehachapi area. Mr. James affirmed to the commission that the pole at its proposed height was required for the City of Ridgecrest and

surrounding areas including the highways.

Vice Chair Taylor noted that there was already in place a 250 foot tower which provided coverage for a competitor's customers and stated that he was surprised by the low level of the proposed Verizon tower. Mr. Taylor advised that he had received positive comments from Verizon customers – who are Ridgecrest residents – when they heard of the proposed new tower.

As his final comment Vice Chair Taylor made comment as to the proposed chain link fence – pointing out that requirements for garbage areas was a block wall.

Chair Biddlingmeier closed public comment at 7.40 p.m. and asked the Commissioners for their comments.

There were no further comments.

Commissioner Jeglum then moved and Vice Chair Taylor seconded a motion to continue Item 7A. until October 9th, 2007.

7B. GPA 07-01 A

Planner Alexander advised that staff recommended that the next three items 7B. 7C. and 7D. be re-scheduled for the Planning Commission meeting scheduled for November 13th.

Commissioner Beres moved and Vice Chair Taylor seconded a motion to re-schedule Items 7B. 7C. and 7D to November 13th, 2007.

Planner Alexander advised that anyone in the audience who might be interested in making comment that there is a joint Planning Commission and City Council meeting set down for October 17th at which Captain Gleason (NAWS) will be making a presentation on the new AICUS and the impact this will have on items 7B. 7C. and 7D.

Chair Biddlingmeier advised that any member of the audience who wished to make comment that evening should feel free to do so now if they wished.

Joel Adams of 620 W Upjohn (#13) stated that he represented one of the sellers of the three pieces of property mentioned in Agenda Items 7B. 7C and 7D. Mr. Adams advised that the sellers were concerned about what effect the proposed changes would have on the value of their property and stated he was willing to wait until November 13th to make his full statement.

8. DISCUSSION ITEMS

8A.

Planner Alexander advised the Commission that staff had received a request from Kern County for comments in regards to a proposal to approve a 125 lot subdivision in unincorporated Kern County adjacent to City Limits. Planner Alexander advised that the City Manager had sent a "will serve" letter for sewer service to the County in regards to the project area..

Commissioner Jeglum stated that her biggest concern was how the sewer service to a tract in the county would be effected – she did not know how this could happen and did not think it should.

Director Public Services Jim McRea indicated that the City Manager has had several requests for will serve letters for areas outside of the city and has worked with the City Attorney on a parcel tax – which would mean lot owners would pay the same fee as a resident plus an additional fee. He advised that the Attorney had not progressed as far as to what would be an equitable fee.

Mr. McRea went on to say that to effect such a tax the City would need a cooperative agreement with the County noting one was currently in place on the Westside of the County. Mr. McRea explained that under such an agreement individual subdivisions would be built according to the design standards of the city.

Mr. McRea advised that the City of Ridgecrest and the County had entered into a cooperative agreement in the late 70s which had to staff's knowledge not been utilized. He said this would

require getting the developer to agree to build the subdivision in accordance with the standards the City would like to see. Mr. McRea advised that the standards of the current General Plan would be met by this agreement but he was not sure if the agreement would meet those standards currently in discussion via the General Plan update. Mr. McRea summarized by indicating that the City Manager had signed a letter some time ago – in 06 or 05 indicating that the City would consider providing sewer service if growth occurred as anticipated but that City projects would be serviced first and out of City projects after that.

Chair Biddlingmeier opened the floor for public comment at 7.52 p.m.

John Whitson of 1549 S Gordon Street asked where the nearest sewer connection would be as he lived in the area and knew that all the residents in that area are on septic tank.

Mr. McRea advised the nearest one was in College Heights but it was only 6 feet deep.

Bud Klamt of 221 N Gold Canyon Drive suggested that unless the City was going to capitulate on some of the tax revenues this proposal be denied.

Andy Kilikauskas of 1559 W. Burns stated that this proposal would mean a complete land lock and no sewer access. He summarized that the proposal would mean putting in a development with tiny lots in an area which currently has 2.5 acre lots acknowledging that the proposed site was County land but indicating it was his thought that the City needed to make a strong statement saying this is not the kind of development needed in this area at present.

Chair Biddlingmeier closed public comment at 7.55 p.m. and asked for comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Beres stated her concern that access would be required and the City would be left to maintain those streets.

Chair Biddlingmeier stated that with all the development already approved in College Heights and in and around the proposed Super Wal-Mart site there is a clear case for cumulative effect that has not been addressed. Chair Biddlingmeier went on to say that without any significant improvement to College Heights he was vehemently opposed. He further said that unless the County could figure out a way to access he was not sure he would prescribe to giving them access via College Heights to that property.

Vice Chair Taylor asked if in fact the City had the option of not granting access and this was confirmed. Mr. Taylor summarized stating “so we could land lock them or force them to go to Downs and pave Downs”.

Commissioner Jeglum stated that the zoning showed that the minimum size was a 2.5 acre lot and the proposed lots were currently zoned E20, another one E10 and another E5. She stated that she thought it was completely out of what the scope for that area was meant to be, further, appraising this project would create a landlocked situation.

Chair Biddlingmeier stated that if growth was anticipated to the South staff could work with the County if the County would like to continue talking to the City about where development was going to occur. Chair Biddlingmeier summarized stating that without major improvements to the major arterial this proposal would not be a good idea.

Comment closed at 7: 58 p.m.

9. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS & COMMENTS

None.

10. ADJOURN - The meeting was adjourned at 7:59 p.m.