

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE THATCHER PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

May 11th, 2021 – 6:00 pm

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair David Griffin, Machael Layton, Wayne Layton, Jerry Hoopes, Brandon Homer, Ray Tuttle
Tom Palmer, Town Engineer

MEMBERS ABSENT: Billy Orr

VISITORS: Gary Allred, Eileen Aaron, Crandall Aaron, John Howard, Pete & Charmaine Chidester, Philip English, Hector Ruedas, Marcia Martin, Becky Johnson, others (see sign-in sheet)

1. Welcome and Roll Call

Chair David Griffin called the meeting to order and established that a quorum was present.

2. Approval of Minutes

The Commission unanimously approved the minutes from the April 13th meeting.

3. Public Hearing

Public Hearing to consider the matter of a Final Plat for Quail Ridge, Phase II-C, consisting of 20 single-family lots.

Mr. Griffin opened the hearing and asked if there was anyone that would like to speak on the matter.

Crandall Aaron introduced himself. Said he's been building houses for 20 years. He, his wife, Eileen and his brother-in-law, Doug Angle, bought the remainder of Quail Ridge from John Martin. Mr. Aaron said he built a lot of houses in Quail Ridge when he worked for John Martin. He loves Thatcher and wants to build out the remainder of the subdivision. He stated that there are 5 streets yet to be built. They plan on building a variety of homes. He stated that the smallest homes allowed in Phase 1 of Quail Ridge was 1100 square feet. He plans to build homes from 1472 square feet to over 1800 square feet. They will have block walls, landscaped front yards, etc. He wants to carry on the vision of John Martin & the original developers of Quail Ridge. Doug Angle has the development experience, but is out of the country. Crandall has the home building experience & will develop in Doug's absence.

A question came from the audience... "how long will the road be closed?"

Mr. Aaron stated that the road closure is temporary while the utilities and roads are being constructed and it's for safety reasons. They will open the road as soon as it is safe to do so.

Mr. Tuttle asked why the proposed street in Phase II-C is called Partridge in some places & Cardinal in others. Mr. Palmer explained that there is one road that has been platted & was approved in 2008 (Oriole), which was Phase II-B. Phase II-C is the next street. It was originally called Cardinal, but due to conflicts with another street in the County, it will likely be changed to Partridge.

Mr. Jeff Henley introduced himself. He lives in Quail Ridge. He said there hadn't been discussion yet about a playground w/ this development. He believes that Quail Ridge is the largest subdivision approved in the Town of Thatcher without a playground & thinks there should be one.

Mr. Aaron said that he has agreed to donate the land just south of the water tower to the Town of Thatcher for use as a park. He has had preliminary discussions w/ Heath Brown, the Town Manager about the town building a park there. He said it's an ideal location because there is parking & easy access.

Mr. Griffin said that many of the parks in other developments throughout town are actually dual-purposed as retention basins.

Mr. Tuttle asked about the ownership of the Tank property vs. the small strip just south of the tank. Mr. Aaron verified that the City of Safford owns the tank & that he (the developer) owns the small strip where the sales trailer is currently located.

Mr. Tuttle asked about water retention & said that there has been flooding issues in the past & we want to avoid flooding in the future. Mr. Aaron stated that there is an engineered retention basin planned as part of Phase II-C which would detain the water from all of the remainder of Quail Ridge.

Mr. Layton asked Mr. Crandall to clarify the intent of parking at the "strip park"... would it be on-street or off-street parking. Mr. Aaron said that it would be on-street.

Mr. John Howard introduced himself & said he lives at 2740 Mockingbird Loop. He is all for the development and all for a park, but he is opposed to a park in the area by the tank. He said that he has heard from his neighbors & that they're concerned about safety & there's not a lot of kids that live right around that area. He is also concerned about drainage and the fact that a lot of drainage in the valley ends up in the canals & then floods & the irrigation district ends up in lawsuits. He said that there are about 160 homes now and another 100 or so proposed and that 260 households absolutely need a park and we need new development, he just doesn't like the location mentioned.

Mr. Griffin asked Mr. Palmer to clarify whether a park was part of the consideration of the final plat before them tonight. Mr. Palmer said that the P&Z & Council can ask for whatever they want. However, a preliminary plat was approved back in 2008 and there was no park shown in the development at that time. Lots of homes are now built and the developer did not have to build a park as part of that development. A new developer is now in the picture & purchased the property based on a preliminary plat that doesn't show a park. The final plat before you is 20 lots. You can decide to require a park, but is that in the scope of a 20-lot plat, or is it a bigger-picture item that needs to be looked at? That's up to you and Council.

Mr. Layton asked about what the rules say today vs. what they said in 2008. Mr. Palmer said he doesn't believe the code required parks back in 2008 and that the pre-plat was approved without them. However, a development of this size that is approved using today's code would be required to furnish a park of some sort. Mr. Palmer said that the reason for both a Preliminary Plat and Final Plat is to give some rights to the property owner (through approval of a pre-plat), but to still allow changes between Pre-plat and Final Plat. He stated that the Final Plat under consideration (Phase II-C) actually has 2 more lots than the Pre-plat showed on that street. So, while the pre-plat gives some rights, it doesn't say changes can't be made.

Mr. Homer said that he thinks a Quail Ridge park is a good idea, but he doesn't like the idea of requiring one as a condition of approval for this final plat.

Mr. Tuttle said that the Preliminary Plat for all of Phase II is for 154 lots. Phase II-C is only 20 of those lots. He is in favor of giving the developer an approval to start building & making money, but give a "heads-up" that a park will likely be required in future phases of the development.

Mr. Hector Ruedas introduced himself. He said he lives in Quail Ridge on the hill, just west of the water tower. He bought his home in 2009 and moved in in 2011. He loves the area & bought the house in part due to the dark night skies. He said that parks need light & he is opposed to the light from a park near his home. When he bought, it was his understanding that all of Phase II would be custom homes, not "regular homes, like those built down below". He was interested to know the size and quality of the homes being built because he thought they should all be custom, similar to what is up on the hill, not "down below". He asked if there will be 2-story homes. He said that there is one of his neighbors who has a 2-story home and it's "kind of an eye-sore" and blocks the view. He wants to make sure drainage is addressed. He mentioned that the new box culvert has lots of tumble weeds that need to be cleaned out. He said that he was talking to someone at the City of Safford & they're concerned about water. He's worried that there may not be enough water to supply all these new homes. He also asked about the sewer treatment plant & whether or not there was enough capacity to handle the sewer. He asked if Quail Ridge Drive will be widened out to Golf Course Road. He really wants to see that happen. He said that we're all taxpayers here & he's worried about who is going to absorb the cost of all the infrastructure. He said that there's lots of dust & the dust control needs to be handled. He said that the dust control needs to be improved. He said that Quail Ridge is a great place, but he really thinks all of Phase II should be custom homes. He wants to preserve the value of his home & his neighbors' homes.

Mr. Tuttle said that there's competing needs. We have a huge need in the valley for affordable housing. Do we want custom homes, or something people can afford to buy?

Mr. Griffin said that the Town has codes that need to be met & asked Mr. Palmer to address Mr. Ruedas' concerns. Mr. Palmer said he could address some of them. He assured Mr. Ruedas that drainage, water, sewer, etc. would have to be met per all of the Town and ADEQ codes. He said that all he could find as far as anything relating to "custom homes" or house sizes was the CC&R's for Quail Ridge Phases I & II-A. There is no mention of "custom" that he could find, but the minimum home size in Phase I was 1100 square feet &

the minimum size in Phase II-A is 1400 square feet. He said that the portion of Quail Ridge Drive that is in the future phases of the subdivision will be widened as the subdivision develops, complete with curb, gutter, sidewalk, etc. However, the portion south of the future subdivision out to Golf Course Road is State Land and will likely not be widened any time in the foreseeable future. He stated that the developer will have to pay for and build all infrastructure and that the tax payers will not have to pay for the infrastructure. He said that the work happening now is “at-risk” work and that once permits are issued, they will require dust control measures to be in-place and that the permit can be put on hold if the contractor doesn’t do their part.

Mr. Phil English introduced himself. He lives on Bobwhite Lane, just north of the proposed development. He doesn’t want two story homes. He would lose his view. He has a big picture window that faces south and he wants to look at the mountain, not somebody’s house. He wants to make sure the CC&R’s for this development look like the CC&R’s for the rest of Quail Ridge. He wants to make sure his home values are protected.

Mr. Tuttle asked Mr. Palmer if he wanted to “address the streetlight issue”. Mr. Palmer said he did not want to address it. He can either enforce the infrastructure plans as approved in 2008 (without street lights) or enforce the new codes regarding streetlights. He said he can do whatever the P&Z & Council direct him to do.

Eileen Aaron introduced herself. She said they want to be good neighbors and don’t want to see any issues. She said that they’ve already been talking to their contractor about dust control and will make sure that any issues are addressed. She said that Tad McRae is their contractor & is very approachable if any has any issues.

Crandall said that they don’t plan to build any 2-story homes. He said that they plan to record CC&R’s that are very similar to what is already recorded for prior phases. He said that CC&R’s are tough to enforce and that they don’t have a lot of teeth. He said that the homes around the water tower were always intended to be the only “custom home” lots, because the other lots in Quail Ridge aren’t big enough for true custom homes.

Mr. Layton pointed out that there is a large Tract shown on the Plat and asked if that wouldn’t be a good place for a park. Mr. Palmer said that the topography and the fact that there wouldn’t be good access to that tract make it not an ideal location.

Mr. Griffin asked Mr. Layton to read two letters that were e-mailed to the Town. He read them:

Dear Committee and council members,

The expansion of the Quail Ridge neighborhood is a wonderful housing opportunity for Gila Valley residents. Presently, the Quail Ridge subdivision is a well-established major development in Thatcher with no access to a playground to accommodate the many families in the neighborhood. With the influx of homes, we request that the Town of Thatcher plan for within its budget or require the builder to install a playground. Comparable public spaces would be the playground at the corner of First Avenue and Eagle Meadow Loop and the playground in the Cota subdivision. Please prioritize this necessary infrastructure as the development continues to expand.

Sincerely,

~Elizabeth Henley
Quail Ridge Resident

Dear committee and council members,

The expansion of the Quail Ridge neighborhood is a wonderful housing opportunity for Gila Valley residents. Presently, Quail Ridge is a large, planned subdivision in Thatcher with no access to a playground to accommodate the many families in the neighborhood. With the influx of homes, we request that the Town of Thatcher plan for within its budget or require the builder to install a playground. Comparable public spaces would be the playground at the corner of First Avenue and Eagle Meadow Loop and the playground in the Cota subdivision. Please prioritize this necessary infrastructure as the development continues to expand.

Sincerely,
Jeff Henley

Mr. Griffin closed the public hearing & asked for discussion amongst the P&Z members.

Mr. Tuttle made a motion to “Approve the Final Plat for Quail Ridge Phase II-C”.

Mr. Wayne Layton said that he'd like some discussion first. He asked Mr. Tuttle if he was recommending approval with no street lights & no park. Mr. Tuttle said that he was. Mr. Layton said that he agreed that asking for a park for this small Phase of the subdivision is probably hard to bear, but he would like to see streetlights. We know it's an issue and why wouldn't we require them?

Mr. Homer said that he like street lights, but he also respects those that don't want bright lights. He said that maybe some low-level street lighting could be explored.

Mr. Tuttle said that in regards to a park, making the developer aware that it will likely be required in the future may solve the problem. Mr. Griffin said the he likes the idea of allowing them to start building some homes & getting some money coming in then a park may be more palatable. Mr. Tuttle said that we could even just ask the developer to donate the land in a future phase for the Town to build a park.

Mr. Griffin said that he would like to see a street light requirement as a condition of approval of the plat. Mr. Hoopes said that when the original development was built, they said they would just handle the lighting of the streets through lights on the houses, but that nobody maintains the lights & keeps them up.

Mr. Griffin said there was a motion on the table... **Mr. Hoopes Seconded the motion.**

Vote: 3 in favor, 3 against. (In Favor: Hoopes, Homer, Tuttle Against: Layton, Layton, Griffin)

Mr. Griffin said they could send a split vote to Council or entertain another motion. Mr. Tuttle said he withdrew his motion.

Mr. W. Layton made a motion to “Recommend approval of the Final Plat for Quail Ridge, Phase II-C with a requirement that street lighting be installed per our current code”.

Ms. M. Layton seconded the motion.

Vote: 4 in favor, 2 against. *(In Favor: Homer, Layton, Layton, Griffin Opposed: Hoopes, Tuttle)*

Homer said that he’d love to see some sort of community involvement in the lighting to ensure it’s not too bright.

Tuttle said that he thinks it’s ridiculous to have just one street with lights & nothing else. Mr. Griffin said that this will be the first of several streets to have lights and that we have to start somewhere.

Mr. Hoopes said that most people in Quail Ridge don’t want lights.

4. Staff Report

Mr. Palmer gave a report on the on-going projects in town.

5. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.