

January 23, 2012

Linus Kafka, City of Tucson Zoning Examiner

Case C9-12-01

Main Gate District (MGD) Urban Overlay District (UOD)

Dear Mr. Kafka:

The West University Neighborhood Association, WUNA, protests the Main Gate District (MGD) Urban Overlay District, (UOD), rezoning for the following reasons:

WUNA has consistently stated in conversations with City staff and publicly that we are opposed to the inclusion and eventual destruction of historically contributing properties in the Transition Area.

The proposed MGD is an overly ambitious rezoning that unjustifiably brings significant financial rewards to a few at a potential substantial loss to surrounding property owners whose historical homes will decline in value because of their proximity. The scope of the project could easily be limited to the developer who is funding and fast tracking the zoning change rather than provide a carte blanche rezoning to a series of developments.

The MGD proposed rezoning is not in conformance with the State enabling legislation and is not likely to survive legal challenges because it confers certain benefits to properties within the zone that are not generally available to properties outside the zone which have the same zoning classification. Moreover, the MGD proposed rezoning directly conflicts with the West University Historic Preservation Zoning (HPZ).

The proposed UOD includes 29 nationally historically listed properties of which at least 19 will become eligible for demolition. WUNA supports adaptive reuse and change of use for these properties but is opposed to their inclusion in the overlay because of the likelihood they will be destroyed due to the incentive to build multistory buildings in their place. The eventual destruction of these historic properties affects the face of our neighborhood on Euclid and Speedway, reduces the historic inventory of buildings in our neighborhood and sets a dangerous precedent for destructive development in older neighborhoods. WUNA wants the Federally, State and locally listed Historic properties removed for consideration for demolition in the UOD and wants to see the inclusion of incentives for preservation and adaptive reuse of these properties.

Heights: WUNA is opposed to the proposed heights of the Main Gate District (up to 14 stories or 159 feet) that will overwhelm the residential neighborhoods to the West and North and exceed by several times the height of U of A buildings located to the East on Speedway Blvd.

In several meetings, WUNA has proposed a gradual Transition Area with building heights lower at the Western side that gradually transition to the tallest buildings on Park Ave. WUNA also proposes a lower overall height for non-historic properties on Speedway to 70 feet. The Transition Zone should be just that, from primarily a residential neighborhood to medium scaled University buildings.

Traffic impacts: Speedway Blvd is already listed as a failing street during peak hours and Euclid Ave. is not far behind. WUNA concerns about gridlock on these streets due to the density of new developments in the Transition Area are not addressed. Nor are the concerns that our neighborhood residents have about cut through traffic and safety on our residential streets being addressed.

WUNA has expressed concerns about the accelerated timeline the City of Tucson is pursuing to create and pass the Main Gate District. This hasty timeline is meant to accommodate a developer that wants to break ground in March 2012. Much more time and thought must be given to the long term consequences of the proposed UOD on our historic residential neighborhood and the general area next to the Transition Area. West University is already experiencing the negative impacts on our neighborhood from another overlay, the IID. The private student dorm project, The District, has resulted in a loss of neighborhood home owners and properties, has 64 foot buildings next to single story houses, has its major ingress through neighborhood streets, has zero setbacks (without streetscape consideration) at all streets, and no architectural connection to the area. This result is from the IID overlay that took three years to write. The City has neglected consideration of the adverse impacts this project will have on our historical residential neighborhood. Our historic neighborhood does not deserve being chopped up and destroyed by inappropriate development within the West University Historic Preservation Zone (HPZ) boundaries.

WUNA invites development that reflects and supports the qualities of our historic neighborhood that make it unique. We have attempted to work with City staff and developers during this process to accomplish this goal. Most of our concerns have been ignored. Rushing through hasty planning decisions that have long term ramifications is not the way to ensure successful development that works for the neighborhood, the developers and the City of Tucson. WUNA encourages the Zoning Examiner to recommend slowing the planning process for this UOD so that the serious concerns the West University Neighborhood has will be addressed so that the mistakes of the IID will not be replicated and magnified.

West University Neighborhood Association  
Chris Gans, President