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City rejects Rojo Grande

Council declined to support housing development outside of city limits

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In the end, the negatives greatly outweighed the positives.

That was the sentiment given by the Sedona City Council after nearly 2½ hours of discussion and public input on Oct. 9. Despite the lengthy discussion, council was not being asked to take a vote, but rather give input on a proposed development in Yavapai County.

In late September, Yavapai Planning Department officials requested comment from the city as a referral agency to Yavapai County, a city report states. This was in regard to a proposal to change the zoning and zoning map for an approximately 172-acre parcel located west of Sedona on the north side of State Route 89A — adjacent to Sedona Pines and Sedona Shadows.

The project, Rojo Grande Sedona, proposes to rezone from its current zoning of residential-single family, to Planned Area Development. As proposed, this would

facilitate a 55-and-older development with 628 manufactured home sites and 60 recreational vehicle sites. The developer, Equity LifeStyle Properties, currently owns and manages Sedona Shadows. Residents would own the manufactured home but would lease the land on which it sat for around \$1,000 a month.

The proposed development is located on the site of the former El Rojo Grande Ranch, which is 2½ miles west of Sedona's jurisdictional boundary. The county asked that the city have its response in by Friday, Oct. 12. The proposed project will go before the county's planning and zoning commission Thursday, Dec. 20.

The project would have its own wells for drinking water and a wastewater treatment plant on site. However, the developers said they are not opposed to connecting to the city's wastewater line at the developer's expense. Also proposed is a traffic light or roundabout at the intersection of 89A and Red Moon Drive

Yavapai County Supervisor Randy Garrison was in attendance at the meeting and said he was there to learn more about the project but mostly wanted to hear the feedback from city, county, staff and the public. He said the city's input weighs heavily with his board since Sedona is the nearest community to the proposed project.

"I'm a little disappointed by your packet," he said. "I think the information provided wasn't necessarily fair and balanced. I think there are several benefits to be gained by the city in this development. But I want to make sure that everybody knows that I am not advocating for this."

He also said that when considering approval of a zone change, the county is not allowed to consider water or traffic issues. All they can consider is whether it fits and whether it's appropriate with the adjoining properties.

Garrison said a benefit would be much-needed workforce housing for Sedona. The developer's attorney, Rod Jarvis, said a survey conducted by the manager of Sedona Shadows showed that 30 percent of its residents are still working. He added that even if just 20 percent of the residents of this proposed development work, that would equate to a significant number of workforce housing units.

"In terms of workforce housing, having 130 to 140 dropped in your lap is a huge benefit to your community," Garrison said. "Right now your workforce travels as far away as Camp Verde, Cottonwood and Verde Village. So if they can live 2½ miles outside of your community, that's a benefit to you. You'll also see a significant increase in your sales tax from those residents who will be coming in and using your stores, businesses and services."

Assistant City Manager Karen Osburn later explained why staff felt there was little benefit to the city from this project.

"When staff did their evaluation, we were looking at our Community Plan — that's our guiding document," she said. "That's what we're measuring proposals against. While it may comport with the county's plan, that is not the perspective we're looking at."

"Supervisor Garrison suggested this is an appropriate use because of the compatibility with the neighboring uses. We absolutely want land use to be compatible but we don't look at new development and assume just because development exists, regardless of when it may have been developed, that it's necessarily the right use or one that you necessarily want to continue to replicate. We have a lot of grandfathered uses in our community that we don't necessarily want to see duplicated or see proliferate."

She added that three of the six outcomes in the Community Plan are housing diversity, economic diversity and reduced traffic, and this project doesn't move the city any closer to achieving any of those outcomes.

After Osburn's comment, Garrison corrected himself and said he was not implying that the information given in the staff-prepared packet was wrong, incomplete or biased. Instead, he meant when staff looked at this development, they did so through the lens of the Community Plan.

"This is not your community — this is the county," he said. "The county has very few restrictions and the burden placed on development is very low compared to the burden you place on development within your city boundaries. All I'm asking is you have to kind of look at what's being developed and how that will fit into your community but it isn't part of your community, but it will have an impact."

While council acknowledged that workforce housing is desperately needed and that this project may help with that, they had many other concerns as well. Traffic was one of the biggest, especially since they were not given a copy of a completed traffic study. The density of the project was also a concern, as was whether or not any of the manufactured homes would be used as short-term vacation rentals.

"I understand that we may have to live with it — I don't think any of us are super happy about it," Mayor Sandy Moriarty said. "If it could provide for some affordable housing, I would love that. But I'm concerned it won't. It is very dense and I realize density is good for open space."

"The other problem we have is that we're used to a much more intense process when we consider any kind of development proposal, which we are not. I want to point out we are not considering it because it's not within our jurisdiction."