



Camelback Road projects on hold

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Two projects along Camelback Road remain on hold as the Phoenix Planning Commission studies three redevelopment proposals at the road's intersection with 44th Street.

The two proposals discussed Thursday evening were Opus West's proposal for the southeast corner, where the well-known "mushroom" bank is located, and M3 Cos. plan for the northwest corner, where the Camel Square development currently sits.

Opus West sought a delay to work out new plans with neighborhood residents, who opposed the initial plans. Attorney Stephen Earl said the company would build in reduced heights and densities from the initial project, although neighborhood activist Paul Barnes said the company remains "a long way from anything the neighborhood would deem acceptable."

The Camel Square proposal was delayed after close to three hours of discussion, pro and con, before a room crowded with residents of the area. Attorneys for the developer described the proposed project and argued it fits with the city's desire to grow smarter, but opponents made the point that the plan violated several existing city plans calling for compatible development and maintenance of views of Camelback Mountain nearby.

The proposal includes three 100-foot tall buildings and will be largely residential, with condominiums, town homes and nine single-family lots. The developer said the parcel, at 17.4 acres, is the largest between the Biltmore area at 24th Street and the Phoenician Resort.

Planning Commission chairman Don Keuth said he expected a third redevelopment proposal, for the site of the London Center on the corner's southwest quadrant, to be filed on Friday.

He proposed that the commission be proactive and look at all three quadrants together. He said the committee should "develop a reasonable solution." Commissioner Wes Gullett will lead the effort.

Keuth emphasized the importance of the decision, saying the city expects many more similar proposals down the road. Attorney Grady Gammage, representing the developer, said the development "is a precursor to the future of Phoenix."

Neither side seemed happy with the outcome. Steve Sanchez, who spoke against the project, said he feared neighbors would be cut out of the discussion. Camilla Strongin, spokeswoman for M3, said the decision was "a little unexpected."

The corner is one of east Phoenix's most prominent, balanced between the residential enclaves of Arcadia and Paradise Valley. The corner not proposed for redevelopment includes the Cork'n Cleaver and an AJ's grocery. But like many of Phoenix's older neighborhoods, some of the area - notably the current Camel Square development - is deteriorating.

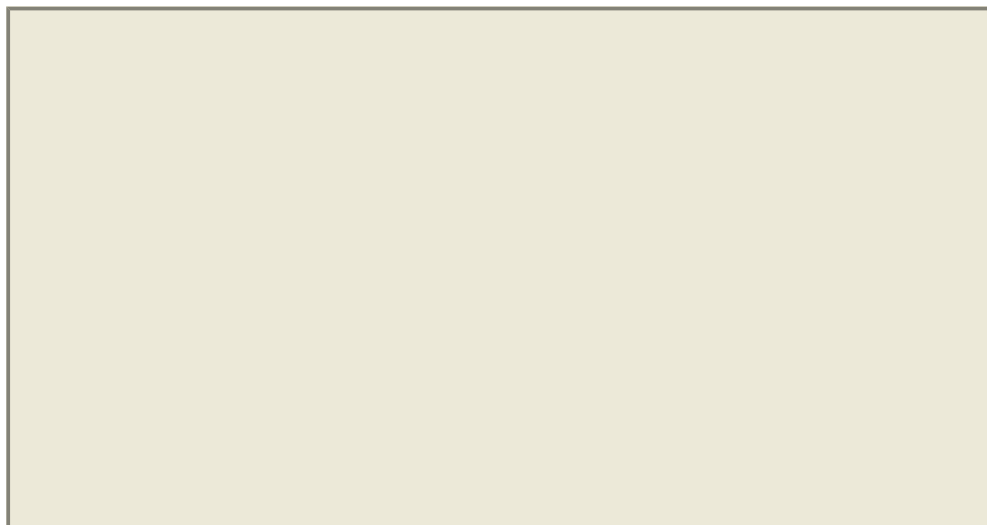
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