A NEW VILLAGE EMERGES IN SOUTHWEST PHOENIX

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PLANNING FOR AN URBAN VILLAGE

In 1985, Phoenix formally adopted the Urban Village Concept to serve as the guide for future form throughout the city. The villages were established to serve two discrete purposes: 1) encourage responsive community involvement through the responsibilities and opportunities provided through their respective village planning committees; and 2) provide a template for land use development that placed an emphasis on a hierarchy of responsive land uses, highlighted by core areas which provide the necessary services, employment, entertainment, and recreational amenities to serve a larger population. Through this philosophy the Urban Village Concept encouraged major village serving uses to be concentrated in one place—the Core—and help develop a sense of place for village residents and reduce travel times and trips. (The Urban Village Concept evolved into the Urban Village Model with the adoption of the Model in 1994. However, the Core component as described in the Model remained consistent with the Core as originally described in the Concept.

The urban villages, which currently number 15, are designed to serve and guide growth in an identified area that includes populations of 100,000 to 150,000. Thus, many of the established villages in Phoenix include populations that greatly exceed many of the incorporated communities in Arizona. Yet, within such a large metropolitan area, or even within a future city of over two million people, urban villages can provide the structure for a unique area that fosters a sense of community and identity.

Each urban village has its own unique character, even while following the same general structure as established in the General Plan. The cores and other village components, for example, differ in size, intensity, height, mix of uses, and character. Urban villages, as contrasted with city council districts where boundaries change after every decennial census, have generally permanent boundaries. Typical boundaries include natural features such as mountains, but most frequently canals, freeways, or major streets define village boundaries.

The most significant component, based on intensity of development, of a successful urban village is its core. The core is intended to be the clearly identifiable central focus for a village. An ideal village core could contain as much as 50 percent of a village’s basic employment (industry, corporate or regional office, communications, state, county, city, and federal government); 25 percent of its service employment (neighborhood, office and retail, and local government); and 50 percent of the multi-family housing units exceeding 15 units per acre. Examples of established urban village core areas in Phoenix include downtown, the area around 24th Street and Camelback, the Park Central Mall area around Thomas Road and Central Avenue, and the Desert Ridge Market Place at Tatum Blvd. and the 101 Freeway.

In addition to the Core Component, the Urban Village Model includes the following components: Neighborhoods, Open Space, Community Service Areas, and Regional Service Areas. Detailed description of each of the components is available in the General Plan.

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In general, the Urban Village Model is based on seven guiding principles:

1) Achieving a goal of 1.25 jobs to housing at maturity or build out;
2) Creating a central focal point for services, shopping, higher density housing and labor-intensive basic employment in each village;
3) Celebrating the lifestyle and character, the unique identity of each village with its history, patterns of development, types of open space and facilities, and types of development from large lot and rural to mixed-use and urban;
4) Protecting the historic character, unique amenities, open spaces, public facilities, neighborhoods, and ensuring compatible new development;
5) Allowing residents opportunities to live, work, play, shop, to receive health care and social services within their villages conveniently, and to access these activities by a multi-modal transportation system;
6) Promoting citizen involvement of village residents and workers in land use decisions affecting them through village planning committee recommendations to the planning commission and city council; and
7) Promoting growth and revitalization in the best interests of the viable neighborhoods, the village as a whole and the entire city.

THE LAVEEN VILLAGE

Located in southwest Phoenix, the Laveen Village is unique in both natural beauty and agricultural heritage in the region. Located between South Mountain Park/Preserve and the Rio Salado (Salt River), the area has long been valued by farmers, equestrians, and those looking for bucolic solitude and easy mountain access. In total, the area contains approximately 28 square miles of largely undeveloped and agricultural property within a ten to twenty minute commute to the Interstate 10 corridor and downtown Phoenix.

In 2000, the total population of the Laveen Village was 9,656, a figure that reflected steady, although moderate, overall growth from 1980 to 1990. Symbolizing the historically agricultural nature of this part of the city, the population of Laveen has increased by only 19% since 1980, contrasted with a citywide population increase of 67%.

As the central business district of Phoenix continues to develop, and as growth pressures continue to increase throughout the region, the Laveen Village is expected to experience rapid growth over the next 20 years. Intensifying overall regional influences is the more immediate development stimuli that will be created through the South Mountain Loop (202 Freeway), which is expected to connect with existing Interstate 10 at the 55th Avenue alignment and loop around South Mountain Park/Preserve to connect with the I-10 at the Santan Freeway (Loop 202) Interchange.

ANTICIPATED DEVELOPMENT

As of the first half of 2004, Phoenix had approved 59 separate rezoning cases in the Laveen Village that will result in the development of approximately 19,000 housing units, potentially increasing the population to roughly 62,000 persons. Additional residential rezoning requests continue to be submitted and processed by the city. This ongoing process now includes commercial development proposals, including retail shops, grocery stores, and other large retail pad sites. Such requests are being considered for almost every arterial street intersection in

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the Laveen Village that is or may easily be served by essential infrastructure. As of November, 2003, there were approximately 326 acres that were either zoned for commercial uses or designated on the General Plan map for commercial uses in the downtown. (That acreage did not include the village core or the freeway corridor.)

Commerce parks and other office opportunities will provide jobs in the area. In 2001 west metro Phoenix saw a development of 5.7 million square feet with absorption of 5.3 million square feet, demonstrating an immediate need for these types of users. Commerce park developers may see this area as having tremendous access to the rest of metropolitan Phoenix and as an opportunity to take advantage of a growing employment base in Laveen. To facilitate the development of employment opportunities, the Loop 202 Freeway Corridor has been rezoned to Commerce Park/General Commerce Park, and General Commercial.

In addition, an area in Laveen planned to develop as a unique Town Center was recently rezoned from an agricultural zoning district to a Planned Commercial District with an emphasis on General Commercial uses. The Town Center site comprised of 40 acres will be the Laveen Village “Main Street” and will include local level retail uses, office uses, as well as higher density residential uses. South of the Town Center, a 40 acre community park has been identified and the city is in the process of purchasing the park site.

LAVEEN COMMERCIAL AREA PLAN

It is both the sheer volume and the rapid pace of growth that necessitates the need for detailed land use planning in the Laveen Village. In particular, the most critical Village Model component—the Core—must be adequately designed for the rapid influx of new commercial tenants, as well as a more dynamic residential population that will provide the critical mass. As created through earlier zoning processes, the Laveen Commercial Area Plan will be identified by three sub-areas, which comprise approximately 610 acres of the downtown:

- **Town Center.** A 40 acre area located east of the Loop 202 Freeway and north of Dobbins Road, the Laveen Town Center is expected to develop as the most distinctive urban area in the region. Zoned to create a true pedestrian environment, the Town Center will be a mixed-use environment where local-level retailers will co-exist with a higher density residential base.

- **Core.** Approximately 160 acres in size, the Core will provide an appropriate environment for larger-scale retailers, highway-related uses, and various commerce park and office developments. Planners will link the Core to the Town Center via various methods of pedestrian linkages.

- **Freeway Corridor.** The largest sub area of the Laveen Commercial Area Plan, the Freeway Corridor will provide a mix of employment, service retail, and higher-density residential.

The purpose of the Laveen Commercial Area Plan is to provide more detailed planning for this dynamic sub area of the downtown. The proximity of Laveen to downtown Phoenix, the alignment of the Loop 202 Freeway, and the spectacular views of both South Mountain Park and the Sierra Estrella Mountains make the Central Laveen Commercial Area Plan an excellent location for new development.

One of the major challenges to creating a unique character for the Laveen Commercial Area Plan is providing connectivity and cohesiveness between the three individual sub areas. While it is important to maintain continuity between these three areas, city planners want to ensure that the functional attributes of each area are reflected in the planning process.

In summary, to effectively support citywide, village, and local objectives, the Laveen Commercial Area Plan must serve the following functions:

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1. Create a hub of civic, commercial, and retail activity for Laveen.
2. Establish a range of development types and intensities within the three planning sub areas. Focus intense urban development within the core and the less intense development types and intensities in the Town Center and Loop 202 Freeway Corridor.
3. Coordinate local and regional transportation investments to increase future mobility and mode choices.
4. Preserve views that contribute to the open character of the Laveen Village.
5. Maximize long-term property values and community benefits within the Laveen Village by emphasizing the overall quality and functionality of development.

By blending the planning objective of providing a core that will serve the future population of Laveen with a respect for the unique history and environment of the area, planners believe that the overall needs of this unique village can be met. Specifically, preserving the rural heritage of Laveen can be provided through the unique appeal of open space, outdoor recreational opportunities, water features, and an appropriate transition from higher intensity urban densities to a more suburban and rural climate. The technical focus on flood control, improved infrastructure, and Rio Salado revitalization, with a special emphasis on creating a sense of community through this planning process, will help ensure that the Laveen Village will provide a quality urban environment in which to live and work.