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City Council okays Shea development contract

By KATHY L. HALL, Editor

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City Manager says project will bring \$82 million to Maricopa over 15 years

Tuesday's City Council meeting took Maricopa one step closer to having a large retail center. The Council heard from City Manager Rick Buss and Economic Development Consultant Dr. Ioanna Morfessis before approving unanimously a development agreement with Shea Properties.

The 743,000 sq. ft. commercial project called "The Wells" will be at the northwest corner of Maricopa-Casa Grande Highway and Porter Road and includes a retail center of 520,000 sq. ft., which will include a Wal-Mart Supercenter and several national chain stores. Additionally, 320 multi-family units are planned for eventually.

As explained by Buss, the city is "not giving away anything", but rather arranging for a "reimbursement plan" with the developer, Shea Properties, to do all the upfront infrastructure work, in lieu of the city collecting impact fees and doing the work itself.

According to both Buss and Morfessis, the agreement is expected to speed up the process of getting a retail center to Maricopa significantly. Several points were made by the two, which clarified how the city benefits from this arrangement:

* The city will receive much-needed infrastructure (roads, etc.) now. Shea Properties is willing to come to Maricopa with a population of about 30,000, a figure way below the usual threshold required by developers.

* Vestar Development Co. received a similar agreement a year ago for a shopping center across SR 347 from Harrah's Ak-Chin, but that project will not be triggered until the population in Maricopa reaches 100,000.

* Morfessis expected the jobs resulting from this project to be between 800-1,000 for retail alone.

During discussions, Morfessis stated that this was what the city needed to do "to stave off the leakage of retail dollars" going north to Chandler and Phoenix. Councilmember Will Dunn explained his reversal in position from a year ago, saying basically he now understood that this agreement will "let [Shea] front the improvements" and that things would happen a lot faster this way. Councilmember Steven Baker said, "Keeping people in our city is what we've got

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to do."

In other business, long time resident and President of the Friends of the Library Mary Lou Smith, along with two young mothers, Cindy Ward and Abby Bishop, pleaded with the Council to find the money to expand the "standing room only" library.

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