

Promenade is coming, CG commission told

The latest design for The Promenade at Casa Grande includes major stores along Interstate 10, a theater complex to the north and other stores to the north-east.

INTERSTATE 10



Designer's rendering

Developers say construction will be on a fast pace

By HAROLD KITCHING 11/3/06
Staff Writer

Although an interview published in the Casa Grande Dispatch last week quoted developers as saying a shopping center at Florence Boulevard and Interstate 10 is on schedule even if groundbreaking has been delayed, the matter arose at Thursday night's Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

On the agenda were major site plan requests for J.C. Penney and Kohl's stores and a 14-screen Harkins theater. A Target complex was approved in July.

The million-square-foot center is being put together by The Pederson Group, Westcor and WDP Partners.

"I recall early summer, late spring when you came before us with the original plan, I specifically asked the question of when groundbreaking was going to start happening for the project," commission Vice Chairwoman Tina Cramp said.

"And I was told that July we're going to break ground. So July came and still no ground broken. Then the end of July Target comes and I asked

the question again. August. OK, great, August is great. Well, we're now in November and you're before us again for more projects and nothing's happening on the development.

"My central point is this has been touted as a great retail shopping center coming to our community to help us out. I agree with that," Cramp continued. "The problem I'm seeing is nothing's happening. A lot of talk is happening but nothing is happening materially.

I would hope there's some reason. I just have a serious concern that we keep approving this and we're told it's going to happen, it's going to happen.

"So again I'll ask you, do we know when we're actually going to be breaking the ground on this project so we can see something happening and so that we can start getting more excited than just seeing pictures of it and hoping and hoping?"

Commission Chairman Timothy Lee added, "We've had others before us who have told us it's coming, it's coming, and what we have now is dirt and no action. So that's the reason for these questions."

One of those proposals was a highly touted shopping center along the entire frontage of Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort. Almost two years later, no dirt has been turned.

"I thought I might get that question tonight," Gary Pederson, vice president of The Pederson Group, replied.

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"It's coming. Our contractor is currently staking the site and any day we're going to have the scrapers out there and moving dirt.

"There's lots of reasons why our groundbreaking has slid a bit. We don't need to get into all of them here tonight. It's always various hurdles that you want to, need to, get over in order to get the project started. So we have cleared those hurdles and our contractor is most likely to start work any day out there. We expected heavy equipment to be out there today, as a matter of fact."

Pederson told the commission, "We have represented repeatedly at various hearings we've had before the council and the commission that our target date for opening is the fall of '07. We've always tagged onto that line that this is a very aggressive date to get this project, a million square feet, open, or at least a good chunk of it open, by the fall of '07.

"As we said, in order to be comfortable with that date we hoped to break ground by September, and obviously we haven't done that but we are still on track for opening our first wave of stores in the fall of '07.

"It's putting a little bit more pressure on our contractor. He'd hoped to have a little bit more time to get everything ready to open by that time, but we are still on track with that schedule."

Part of the work required to get a 50 percent sales tax rebate from the city involves widening the Florence Boulevard overpass on I-10, something that takes approval from the Arizona Department of Transportation.

"That's a long story; that's part of the reason why there has been a delay," Pederson said. "But we have come to a meeting of the minds on what needs to occur in order to get the various approvals that we need to get from ADOT in order to start.

"We started talking to ADOT in January of 2005, almost two years ago now, and I think that I'll use a little discretion as far as what happened with them, but to make a long story short we have come to an agreement with ADOT and we're prepared to move forward."

Lee said, "I think some of the frustration is, Lowe's said they were coming, and they're open. You know, up and down Florence Boulevard several folks have said they're coming and we've never seen them again. And signs have gone up and signs have gone down, signs have gone up, signs have gone down. That's a little bit of a frustration, and we're hearing it all over town."

It was pointed out earlier that building a million-square-foot shopping center on more than 130 acres is a longer, more detailed project

than a single store such as Lowe's or Home Depot.

"We understand you guys' frustration," Todd Chester of WDP Partners said, "and just to reiterate, we would have loved to have started construction in July but unfortunately, for many different reasons, we weren't able to start in July and not in September.

"But part of building this type of center with this many moving parts with this many hurdles in front of us, we are through all the major problems now. There are other things that are going to come up, but none of these big players, these big majors, would be here tonight if there's any chance that we'd miss our date. They wouldn't waste their time here."

Lee said he was happy to see that stores mentioned earlier in the planning process are coming to the center, but he still hasn't seen Dillard's listed.

"You may see us here again next month," Pederson replied.

Pederson said the center planners had taken increased traffic into consideration.

"We see that access is critical and traffic on Florence Boulevard can be a problem," he said, "and that's why as part of Phase One we are putting the mid-section line, which is Mission Parkway, all the way from Florence up to Cottonwood.

"As I have said on numerous times, it won't take long for people to realize that one of the best ways to get into the center will be to go east on Cottonwood and then come down on the parkway."

Chester added, "The most important part of a project like this is that people not only get in but get out. There's nothing that kills a project quicker than people that can get there and can never leave. Although we'd like them to continue shopping, people get frustrated and will not come back. So that is one of the biggest things we look at right out of the gate when we're designing these things."

David Hoffman, from the architectural firm handling the Penney store, told the commission, "We have worked with Todd and his group, WDP, when we did the project we did in Yuma.

"Penney's is on schedule for the October 2007 opening, and believe me, the momentum and the inertia that has been pulled out of the ground and is going on our side is incredible, and we're working with contractors currently with a very accelerated schedule. We're planning on building the building in five to six months once we get going.

"So October of 2007 is on our schedule, as well. I think that once this thing pops, it's going to be unbelievable the amount of work you see out there."