

I-10 widening leads to larger commercial area in CG

By Harold Kitching, Staff Writer
June 10, 2008

In its long-range planning for the time that Interstate 10 is widened through part of Casa Grande, and Selma Highway becomes a major interchange, the City Council has approved two General Plan changes to allow for regional commercial areas there.

The Arizona Department of Transportation held hearings months ago on the proposal, which would see the Jimmie Kerwr Boulevard interchange go away and the Sunland Gin interchange moved to allow better traffic flow.

Owners of Nichols Ranch, which lies just below the Mission Royale developments, will now expand its commercial area from 18 acres to 69.7 acres, divided into two parts. The area at the northwest corner of I-10 and Selma, city planners said, is suitable for a large retail client with smaller businesses around it, while the other, at Selma and Hacienda Road, would be suitable for a grocery center and other neighborhood shops.

Mountain Shadows, just south of Selma Highway, will be changed on 94 acres from a mix of commercial and low- and high-density residential to regional commercial. The city defines regional commercial as an area where regional shopping centers may be located.

Because of ADOT's plans for the Selma interchange, planner Keith Newman said during the Planning and Zoning Commission's earlier hearings on the request, "the applicant feels that by changing the current land usage, they would better be able to take advantage of the access and so forth for commercial versus residential. As we all know, the market isn't screaming right now."

Commission member Jim Klein asked what type of commercial uses might go onto the property.

"My understanding is it would be basic normal commercial uses that you would see, possibly some type of stuff that you would see maybe at The Promenade - maybe," he said. "This is some time down the road. As the population of Casa Grande grows, you can see some of those stores maybe expanding or even other large retail-type uses."

The Planning and Zoning Commission sent favorable recommendations to the council for both Nichols Ranch and Mountain Shadows.

When the matter was before the council, Mayor Bob Jackson asked how certain the city could be that ADOT is actually going to be doing the widening and interchange work. "Is that a decision that has been made or is it still in the process of being made?" he asked.

City Manager Jim Thompson replied, "It's still in the process but there's a very high probability. They've actually engaged in discussions on acquisition of right of way associated with a portion to the south."

During an ADOT hearing on the proposals, Project Manager Laurel Parker told the council that the new Selma Highway interchange would have frontage roads leading south to the present Jimmie Kerr

interchange.

"The on and off ramps at Jimmie Kerr would go away," Parker said. "The overpass would remain in place and you would access Jimmie Kerr through a series of frontage roads."

As she showed tentative engineering drawings of the proposals, Parker said, "We have improved the safety of this area, and one of the ways we did that was to remove the on and off ramps at Jimmie Kerr and also to move Sunland Gin to the west to open up the interchange and provide a safer (I-10/I-8) system-to-system interchange.

"Any of you who drive the freeway on a regular basis know it could use some additional lanes. There are some deficiencies, there's some areas where there's not enough area for acceleration and some of the folks that live off of Arica Road are telling me about the backup at the traffic interchange at Sunland Gin and some of the issues with the trucks in that area.

"Moving Sunland Gin will actually improve access for you folks. It will keep the trucks from backing up on the freeway. We got some good comments from the community about separating the truck access, Love's access, from the community's access."

No construction date has been set and no announcement about funding has been made.