

STAFF REPORT
City of Lancaster, California

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RSL

Date: January 9, 2007

To: Mayor Hearn and Members of the City Council

From: Brian S. Ludicke, Planning Director

Subject: **Amargosa Creek Specific Plan-Recommendation of Design Option**

Recommendation:

Approve Plan Option 2B (Revised) as recommended by the Planning Commission as the organizational concept for the Amargosa Creek Specific Plan.

Background:

On November 13, 2006 the City Council, in a joint study session with the Planning Commission, reviewed several design options prepared by RTKL as potential organizational concepts for the Amargosa Creek Specific Plan. Staff prepared a report for the study session (see Attachment A) that discussed the various options and contained a preliminary recommendation that Option 2 (Attachment C) be used as the organizational concept for the Specific Plan.

Input received during the joint study session led staff to direct RTKL to prepare another plan option (based on Option 2), known as Option 2B, for consideration. On December 14, 2006 a community meeting was held to review all six options (1, 2, 2B, 3, 4A, and 4B). Members of the public discussed a number of broad themes and concerns with respect to the development of the Amargosa Creek project at this community meeting, which are summarized in the attached staff report for the December 18, 2006 Planning Commission meeting (Attachment B). Staff and the Commission reviewed these concerns and took them into account when analyzing the various options and making final recommendations.

Discussion:

The Planning Commission staff report of December 18, 2006 (Attachment B) outlines staff's review of the various options and the basis for staff's recommendation of Option 2B (Attachment D) as the organizing concept for the Amargosa Creek Specific Plan. The Commission, while in general agreement with design approach of Option 2B, felt that there were several changes that could improve and strengthen the overall concept. As a result, RTKL prepared Option 2B (Revised) (Attachment E) which incorporated a number of revisions in response to the Commission's concerns:

- Strengthen the north-south pedestrian axis south of the main plaza area: An additional building has been added immediately south of the plaza area to provide a continuation of the pedestrian environment south to the anchor retail tenants.
- Strengthen the pedestrian connection to Lancaster City Park: Two additional buildings have been added near the central access to the site to provide a pedestrian connection and direct pedestrians from the main activity areas of the park into the pedestrian “main street” and plaza areas of the center.
- Provide a design that allows for the eastward extension of the east-west “main street” feature to 5th Street West: The eastern portion of the center has been redesigned to accomplish this objective.
- Evaluate the potential for restricting vehicular traffic in the main plaza area and along portions of the east-west “main street”: The plan has not been physically revised to denote this change; however, it is agreed that the final design should allow for barriers (bollards, gates, etc.) that would allow restriction of vehicular traffic for various community events or similar reasons. A decision on permanent restrictions is premature at this time; in general, staff and RTKL believe that vehicular traffic provides for activity and may make the eastern portions of the center more flexible with respect to tenant occupancies.
- Require two-story buildings around the main plaza area to provide a feeling of physical enclosure for the space and generate additional activity through the provision of office or other uses on the second floor: The plan has been revised to denote these two story buildings through the number “2” being located on them. This requirement may need some flexibility in regards to certain retail tenants; in such cases the specific plan could require that the building be structurally designed for and have the appearance of a two story building, but the second floor could be installed at a future date.
- Consider whether a floor area yield of 25% can be achieved along the properties fronting 10th Street West: Achieving a 25% yield would be very difficult and could adversely affect the overall function of the center. However, with the provision of two story buildings at key locations (e.g., the main street intersection with 10th Street West), a reasonable floor area yield can be achieved. The Commission has recommended establishing an objective for the specific plan of 15% floor area yield on the 10th Street West frontage; RTKL designers believe this may be possible if, as noted earlier, multi-story buildings are provided in certain frontage locations.
- Consider an optional hotel location at the south end of the main north-south axis: This area is now denoted on the plan as a potential hotel site.
- Require that any initial phase of development include the development of the main pedestrian plaza: This provision would be included in any phasing plans prepared as part of the specific plan.

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Staff has reviewed proposed Option 2B (Revised) in light of staff's original recommendations and the proposed changes incorporated by the Planning Commission. Staff believes that the modifications act to further strengthen the pedestrian elements of the overall plan and improve its connectivity with the surrounding areas, particularly Lancaster City Park. The plan responds to citizen desires for creating a project with a sense of place and design quality that will act as both a commercial and community center. The plan also encompasses a "hybrid" design approach that staff believes is important in providing proper tenant flexibility, as noted in the staff report of November 13, 2006 (Attachment A). Staff therefore recommends that the City Council approve Option 2B (Revised), incorporating the changes as recommended by the Planning Commission, as the organizing concept for preparation of the Amargosa Creek Specific Plan.