

Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the City Council and the Planning Commission held September 12, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mayor Lopez Rogers and Council Members

Jim McDonald, Vice Mayor  
Jim Buster  
Stephanie Karlin  
Frank Scott  
Charles Vierhout  
Ken Weise

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Michael Long, Chair  
Angela Cotera, Vice Chair  
Lisa Amos, Commissioner  
David Iwanski, Commissioner  
Grace Carrillo, Commissioner  
Sean Scibienski, Commissioner

**COMMISSIONER ABSENT/EXCUSED**

David Scanlon

**ALSO PRESENT**

Charlie McClendon, City Manager  
David Fitzhugh, Assistant City Manager  
Rogene Hill, Assistant City Manager  
Tracey Stevens, Planning Manager  
Stacey Bridge-Denzak, Planner I  
Andrew McGuire, City Attorney  
Carmen Martinez, City Clerk

**1) ROLL CALL BY THE CITY CLERK**

**2) GENERAL PLAN 2030**

Staff requests that City Council and Planning Commission, through an interactive dialog, provide comments and direction on the first draft of the General Plan 2030.

Stacey Bridge-Denzak, Planner I, Development Services, said the purpose of the meeting was to obtain City Council confirmation of various elements of the General Plan 2030 draft, including:

- New land use categories and designations
- The transit-oriented development focus
- The employment emphasis
- The low density intent for southern Avondale
- The significance of Old Town Avondale
- The stated cultural values of the city
- The stated theme of "A Healthy Sustainable Community"

Ms. Bridge-Denzak said land use is at the heart of the General Plan. People consult the land use map when they want to invest in property, or want clarification on what they can do with their property. General Plan 2030 features several new land use categories. The High-Intensity Office, Urban Commercial, and Urban Residential land uses focus on density. They allow for multi-story development situated close to transit stops. The High-Intensity Office designation focuses on employment uses. Urban Commercial emphasizes a commercial focus, with some residential. Urban Residential focuses on multi-story residential with some commercial. Mixed-use is often associated with transit-oriented land use, allowing for some density and with some commercial uses mixed in. Three new job-centered land uses are described in the plan: Corporate Park, Business Park, and Industrial.

Ms. Bridge-Denzak explained that Avondale's projected final build-out population of 220,000 will be similar to other Valley cities that currently have transit. A fixed guide way system is being proposed along 99<sup>th</sup> Avenue south to McDowell, then west to 107<sup>th</sup> Avenue, before heading south to Roosevelt. This alignment will bring transit to the City Center, connecting with the transit center there. From City Center, the transit corridor would continue west towards Goodyear, south to Van Buren where it crosses the river, before heading back north to connect with Goodyear's Park and Ride. This proposed corridor is designed to tie into numerous job and residential land uses.

Vice Chair Cotera inquired whether the transit mode proposed for the transit corridor would tie into the regional light rail system, or would it be unique to Avondale. Ms. Bridge-Denzak said it would not be Avondale unique. Avondale has been participating in a regional study of transit opportunities in the area. Past studies indicate that regional light rail will enter Avondale near 99<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Thomas. General Plan 2030 proposes a route through the community that connects with the Phoenix and Goodyear alignments, while efficiently meeting Avondale's needs.

Ms. Bridge-Denzak said that while a light rail corridor is designed to meet the transit needs of the northern part of the city, a commuter line is proposed along MC-85, with one stop near Old Town, and another across from the current Fry's shopping center. A third transportation corridor could be associated with SR-30, which uses an alignment agreed upon by Avondale and Arizona Department of Transportation. Transportation in this area aims to take advantage of the freeway commercial land uses along major intersections, and the new growth planned for Phoenix International Raceway (PIR). The General Plan also seeks to maintain the rural/low density character of the area. The Gila River Scenic District is an open space land use that promotes the area's natural features, while also allowing for very limited commercial use.

Council Member Weise inquired about the customer base for businesses located in the low density area. Ms. Bridge-Denzak responded that SR-801 would provide a gateway into that area. Even though it is low density, there is enough population in the area to support the type of development envisioned there. PIR also serves as a draw, and there might be a corporate presence in the area in the future.

Vice Mayor McDonald asked whether light industrial was among the intended uses for the mixed use areas around MC-85. Ms. Bridge-Denzak explained that it would just be

commercial. Vice Mayor McDonald used a map to note one area that has restricted access to MC-85 because of the railroad. He felt it would be more appropriate to have light industrial designated for that space since it could benefit from the rail access.

Vice Chair Cotera noted general road access issues created by the commuter rail line being adjacent to MC-85. Ms. Bridge-Denzak responded that those issues would be addressed in detail as those developments enter the city.

Ms. Bridge-Denzak said the General Plan 2030 reflects the importance of maintaining open space in Avondale. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan also guides this type of decisions. As development comes into the city, the plan ensures that open space requirements are adhered to. It also emphasizes an interconnected open space trail system to promote non-motorized means of travel, tying into the theme of a sustainable and healthy community. By offering opportunities to get people walking, their health and quality of life improves. She stated that a sustainable environment is a key Avondale value. The new energy element presents goals and policies to incentivize environmentally friendly development. Avondale aims to be a regional leader in this area. A strong trail system is proposed along the Agua Fria River and in the Tres Rios area. A non-motorized network would tie this open space trail system directly into Avondale, connecting key locations throughout the city, including City Center.

Ms. Bridge-Denzak explained that Avondale's community facilities provide residents with the quality of life that they have come to expect from the city. In order for these facilities to be successful, the plan ensures that their associated infrastructure needs are also adequately planned for and met. Avondale also has some cultural gems that could become regional attractions if positioned properly.

Council Member Karlin inquired whether the new concept of urban agriculture is included as part of the open space theme. Ms. Bridge-Denzak said those types of uses are encouraged as part of the new General Plan's health initiative. Tracey Stevens, Planning Manager, added that the General Plan contains policies in the open space and neighborhood themes that encourage community gardens as part of a revitalization effort. Council Member Karlin explained that she was specifically referring to for-profit agricultural uses in urban areas. As people are seeking out alternative fuels, markets have developed for biofuels, and some cities consider these uses part of their open space plan. Avondale has a low percentage of open space, and this type of use would help increase it.

Ms. Bridge-Denzak said the Neighborhoods and Economic Vitality theme increases sustainable living by creating walkable and livable communities that provide housing close to jobs and services. The goal is to develop communities that are nearly self-supporting, while also being pedestrian friendly. The General Plan also calls for larger lot developments in the southern part of the city. Existing older neighborhoods such as Old Town Avondale could be revitalized through the use of infill incentives. The economic vitality theme emphasizes land uses in growth areas that will help maintain a strong sales tax base, and in turn sustain the government. Development would pay its fair share. There is a cost to benefit ratio associated with development coming to Avondale, and that development should benefit everyone.

Council Member Buster inquired about the types of incentives that would be offered for infill development. Ms. Bridge-Denzak explained that the Ordinance currently offers reduced application fees and decreased review times as infill incentives. This plan could benefit from further refinement and the incorporation of new ideas to encourage people to locate to those parts of the city.

Commissioner Scibienski felt that the infill designated areas were too sparse, and said other areas should be included as well. Many parts of the city have small empty lots that could accommodate projects that would benefit from the reduced requirements. Ms. Bridge-Denzak said the infill development areas are focused on the older neighborhoods. The boundaries have been reduced over time. Council Member Scott said the east side of Dysart Road in particular would benefit from an incentive plan. Ms. Bridge-Denzak noted that staff is planning a revitalization effort that would provide another opportunity to reconsider the boundaries.

Ms. Bridge-Denzak reviewed the remaining timeline for General Plan 2030. Council and Commission comments from this meeting will be incorporated into a draft being prepared for public agency review on October 3. Another community meeting will occur at the beginning of the year to obtain more public input before it goes into public hearings with the Planning Commission and City Council. Once approved, General Plan 2030 will be brought before the public for a vote.

Mayor Lopez Rogers said it is important that the City Council and the Planning Commission work together on the General Plan. Council is looking to update its visioning effort in the near future, with the goal of creating a quality community that people will want to move to.

Ms. Stevens discussed the new Gateway Entry and Wayfinding Sign Program being proposed for Avondale. Staff has been working on this proposal for some time, and has engaged the Municipal Art Committee at their request to create something that would serve as a brand for the city. The intent of the program is to create an identity for Avondale, enhance streets, and create gateway entrances into the city. Wayfinding signs will also be used to identify some of Avondale's points of pride. The program seeks to enhance economic development practices, and create pleasing landscaped entryways and medians. The new signs would convey the message that Avondale is a sustainable and environmentally friendly community.

Ms. Stevens explained that three types of signs are envisioned. Entryway monument signs in median landscapes would use a river, mountain, and water theme similar to the City logo. The monument signs would be located at six locations: 99<sup>th</sup> Avenue, two entries off I-10 at Avondale Boulevard, the main entrance on Indian School Road, at McDowell and Dysart Road, and at MC-85 and Dysart Road. A new set of entry signs would replace the existing blue signs at every corner along the boundary. Wayfinding signs would be located throughout the city to emphasize points of pride, including Old Town and other places that deserve attention.

Ms. Stevens said the Municipal Arts Committee recommended moving forward with the program pending Council direction. They have offered to fund five signs in an effort to get the first phase started. The remaining signs would have to be funded either by grants or

future phase funding. New signs could be included as part of new development as well, and some of the signs are located within CIP projects.

Council Member Buster inquired about the source of money for the Municipal Arts Committee fund. Charlie McClendon, City Manager, explained that they are offering to pay for the signs through a combination of money accrued through the years, and from developer fees. Under the Art Ordinance, developers are required to provide either art or in-lieu payments. Council Member Buster inquired about the cost of the signs. Ms. Stevens responded that preliminary estimates suggest that the five monument signs could cost a total of between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

Council Member Karlin felt that the gateway monument signs were fresh and vibrant. She felt the canoe motif on the directional signs had little to do with Avondale, however. Vice Chair Cotera noted that the entry signs depicting the sun setting behind the southern mountains were astronomically impossible. The image of the sun also looks hot, which is not a message Avondale needs to reinforce.

Commissioner Amos cautioned that citizens might raise concerns about spending money on aesthetic projects during a bad economy. She preferred that the signs be replaced in phases as they become worn out, rather than being replaced all at once.

Commissioner Scibienski said he liked the design of the signs, but raised concerns that they conflicted with the City's current branding effort. If the signs are adopted, would a new City logo be required to match them? Council Member Weise concurred that the new signs seem to take branding in a new direction. In a bad economy it would be questionable to spend money on something not absolutely necessary. Vice Mayor McDonald noted that the Arts Council already has the funding to pay for five signs. The goal is not simply to replace signs but to create something that will catch people's attention. Council Member Vierhout said he liked the lighter blue background and the orange-colored sun. Vice Chair Cotera said the economy will eventually recover, and it will be important to send the message that Avondale has made it through the recession. The timing has to be right, however. Commissioner Amos cautioned against cluttering up the signs with too many images, which could be confusing.

Mayor Lopez Rogers felt that care should be taken to avoid separating Old Town from the rest of the community in the effort to distinguish it. It would be better to refer to the area as Historical Old Town. She does not see the new signs as an economic issue since the Committee already have the funding for them. Avondale's branding should portray it as a place that people will want to move to. She felt some of the designs were a little crowded and agreed that the sun image should be removed.

Mr. McClendon said staff would return to the Arts Commission to refine the designs based on the feedback. The designs will return to Council for final approval at a future date.

Vice Mayor McDonald said the General Plan draft did a good job of reflecting the many conversations that City Council has had for years. Mayor Lopez Rogers agreed.

**3) ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business before the Council, Vice Mayor McDonald moved to adjourn the work session. Council Member Weise seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m.

  
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Mayor Lopez Rogers

  
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Carmen Martinez, CMC  
City Clerk

**CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Joint Session of the Council and the Planning Commission of the City of Avondale and held on the 12th day of September 2011. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that the quorum was present.

  
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City Clerk