

## **TOWN COUNCIL TO CONSIDER THE TOWN CENTER REZONING**

**SAHUARITA, AZ** (Jan. 29, 2009) – Imagine an upscale, pedestrian friendly destination with an attractive collection of municipal uses and businesses, including shops, restaurants, entertainment and health care facilities, located right here in Sahuarita. A Town Center vision has been promoted by Rancho Sahuarita since 1996, and on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Town Council may agree to help make that dream a reality.

The Sahuarita Town Center is proposed to consist of 400 acres, with 3,000,000 sq. ft. of commercial and higher density residential development and over 6,500 jobs. The plan features an old-fashioned Main Street, Central Park, a municipal complex, a library, a Post Office, retail shops, and residential uses, located south of Sahuarita Rd. and on both sides of I-19. Rancho Sahuarita envisions that this “focal point for the entire town” will incorporate an urban, mixed-use design, inspired by the traditional downtowns found in many small communities. Bob Sharpe, the managing partner of Rancho Sahuarita, describes the Sahuarita Town Center as a cluster of architecturally distinctive buildings, which will create a one-of-a-kind destination, and showcase Rancho Sahuarita’s unique 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Colonial architecture.

Rancho Sahuarita is proposing a public/private partnership with the Town of Sahuarita to facilitate the construction of the improvements required to attract new commercial development to the Town Center area at a much earlier date than might otherwise happen. Under this proposal, Rancho Sahuarita’s investment in these public infrastructure costs would be reimbursed by the Town from 50% of the additional tax on rental and lodging income and retail sales proceeds generated by users located “in this new commercial district,” according to Sharpe.

Prior to formation of a public/private partnership, Rancho Sahuarita is requesting that amendments to its 14 year old Specific Plan, that are required to facilitate a Town Center and a new Home Depot store, be approved by the Mayor and Town Council. Since the adoption of the Specific Plan almost 15 years ago, the standards for economically sustainable development have changed. Rancho Sahuarita feels that for the Town Center to thrive and attract new businesses to the area, the Specific Plan for the Town Center needs to be updated to include adjacent properties. The changes would also make the location more appealing to businesses through improved signage, and create a more pedestrian friendly environment, with lifestyle oriented gathering places.

Some of the Specific Plan provisions currently disallow innovative uses of the property by limiting flexibility. For instance, by clustering commercial buildings together, the walking distance between businesses is decreased, promoting a more pedestrian friendly village setting. In addition, parking and open space can

be more efficiently utilized to create plazas, attractive streetscapes, and small parks. Clustering of commercial buildings can be accomplished by revising building setback limitations to improve the relationship between the street and structures.

Rancho Sahuarita is also asking that signage regulations be improved through the proposed amendments. A revised signage plan will allow Sahuarita businesses to have better identification, and increase the visibility and economic viability of commercial tenants.

Lastly, there is a request to update the Specific Plan's parking regulations. When the plan was originally adopted, the parking standards required substantially more parking area than was later proven to be needed. Since that time, planning professionals have learned about the "urban heat island effect" that contributes to higher temperatures, and the importance of reducing "parking lot sprawl," increasing pedestrian accessibility, improving design flexibility and enhancing community aesthetics. In recognition of regional planning, the amendment request for parking reduction mirrors that of a Pima County parking ordinance that was adopted in October 2008.

Sharpe concluded that, "Along with the proposed public/private partnership to fund essential Sahuarita Town Center public infrastructure, these proposed amendments are critical to creating a commercially viable Sahuarita and a truly unique destination and identity for the community."

### **About Rancho Sahuarita**

Situated just south of Tucson, Rancho Sahuarita is southern Arizona's best master-planned community. With a total of 573 new home sales during 2007, Rancho Sahuarita was the 11<sup>th</sup> fastest selling master planned community in the country, according to Robert Charles Lesser, the renowned, national consulting firm. It features a 15-acre lake park, miles of paved trails that weave throughout the community, neighborhood parks with pools, and Club Rancho Sahuarita, with the largest private water park in the metro area. Surrounded by the beauty of pristine desert, mountain ranges and pecan groves, Rancho Sahuarita offers many neighborhoods by KB Home, Richmond American Homes, Pulte Homes, Maracay Homes and D.R. Horton Homes, priced from the 150s to the high 400s.

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