

Council increases downtown maximum building heights

By Edward Gately

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The Scottsdale City Council narrowly approved the second proposal filed under the downtown infill-incentive district and plan that sought a maximum building height of 90 feet.

Brothers Mike Gebran and Gebran Gebran own the U.S. Egg restaurant on the southwestern corner of Scottsdale Road and Angus Drive and vacant property to the north.

They asked the city to rezone the property to allow mixed-use development opportunities and to allow an increase in building height from 50 feet to 90 feet — about the height of the W Scottsdale Hotel & Residences on Camelback Road just east of Scottsdale Road.

The proposal didn't include a specific site plan or building elevations, said John Berry, the Gebrans' zoning attorney. The zoning change and amended development standards are needed to make the property more marketable and accelerate future development, he said.

The lack of a site plan drew heavy criticism from Vice Mayor Bob Littlefield and Councilman Ron McCullagh at Tuesday's council meeting.

"The problem is there is no project," McCullagh said. "This is just a good example of the downtown infill-incentive district offering no contributions to the city. If

you brought a project to the city, I would support this."

Berry said the owners will be required to return to the council with a site plan and specific user.

"This is so they can move forward more quickly when the economy turns around," he said.

Littlefield said the proposal is "a poster child" of how poorly the council has handled the downtown area in the past several months.

However, Councilman Dennis Robbins urged approval of the proposal, saying it would allow the brothers to market the property and improve the area.

"We're either serious about economic development or we just use it when we run for office," he said.

Littlefield said height and density do not equal economic development.

"In that case, let's just take all of downtown and rezone it to 150 feet," he said.

The council voted 4-3 to approve the proposal. Mayor Jim Lane, Robbins and Councilwomen Suzanne Klapp and Linda Milhaven voted yes, and Councilwoman Lisa Borowsky, Littlefield and McCullagh voted no.

The infill-incentive plan established a maximum height of 150 feet north of the Arizona Canal and in an area surrounding Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn Medical Center.

The council this year approved the Blue

Sky apartments proposal that will allow buildings of more than 100 feet just north of Camelback Road, on the eastern side of Scottsdale Road, the first project approved under the new infill-district policy.

Also Tuesday, the council unanimously adopted an amendment to its agreement with SouthBridge developer Fred Unger that allows him to proceed with residential development along the south side of the canal, east and west of Goldwater Boulevard.

Unger asked the council to adopt the amendment that allows a three-year extension on the development agreement relating to the city-owned Rose Garden parking lot, on the northwestern corner of Goldwater and Fifth Avenue, and the adjacent developer-owned property along Fifth and the canal.

The original agreement, approved in 2005, said that 124 parking spaces and an additional 60 public-parking spaces would be built on the Rose Garden property. Subsequent amendments reduced the parking requirement. McCullagh wanted the new agreement to include the original parking requirement.

Unger told the council the project will include 127 underground public-parking spaces and another 19 public-parking spaces on the street. In addition, it will include a walkway to the Goldwater tunnel and canal-bank improvements. Unger plans to develop 76 residential units, with street-front retail, on three parcels.