

Planning panel OKs Valley Ho expansion

Plan will include 70 hotel rooms, ballroom and parking

By Edward Gately
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Westroc Hotels & Resorts on Wednesday moved a step closer to gaining Scottsdale's approval of its plan to expand downtown's Hotel Valley Ho.

The Planning Commission unanimously recommended City Council approval of modified zoning stipulations, amended development standards and a new development plan for about 70 hotel rooms, a ballroom with meeting rooms and parking facilities on a 4-acre site at the southwestern corner of Main and 69th streets.

The council tentatively is scheduled to consider the case at its Oct. 18 meeting.

According to the plan, the land is divided into two areas, with the northern two-thirds of the site to include the guest rooms, ballroom and meeting rooms; and the southern one-third to house parking and service access.

The parcel was previously rezoned to allow for 62 townhouses in three-story buildings 36 feet high. The maximum height would remain at 36 feet, said John Berry, an attorney representing Westroc, the hotel's developer and operator.

"This is not a rezoning case," he said. "This is just modifying the zoning stipulations."

The changes would give Westroc more flexibility to bring the acreage to the market for future expansion opportunities, Berry said.

Scott Lyon, Westroc's CEO, said the purpose of the request is to allow the property to return to a hotel use.

"It would be two- to three-story height of hotel rooms supported by surface parking, a small conference facility and an open-space pool, kind of like what used to be back there when it was the old Ramada," he said. "The approvals that are on the site today are for a specific plat for a condo project, and I didn't want to wait for the demand for a condo project to come back."

Westroc sold the property in 2004 then bought it back last year.

"The market obviously had turned and it was an opportunistic purchase, and we wanted to control our front door," Lyon said. "This is really a logical step because it's hard to go out and secure financing for any kind of project like we're talking about unless you have a degree of certainty that you can build what you're planning. Rather

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than spend all the time and effort to finish detailed plans, we want to know we have the ability to do it before we explore those avenues."

It's still not the right time for the expansion, but Westroc's "hope is that the hotel market will recover faster than the residential market," Lyon said.

Hotel Valley Ho, built in 1956, was expanded and remodeled in 2005. It has 194 rooms and about 35 condominiums in a seven-story tower.

Tavern entertainment OK'd

Also at its meeting, the commission voted 6-1 to recommend council approval of a conditional-use permit for live entertainment at the Twisted Lizard Tavern & Grille, at McDowell Mountain Ranch Road and 105th Street. Commissioner Matthew Cody voted against approval.

A number of nearby residents urged the commission to vote against the request, citing incidents of loud noise coming from the location into the early morning hours.

John Rowton presented the commission with a petition signed by residents who live within two blocks of the Twisted Lizard.

"I just don't want to be woken up," he said. "I came here from the big city of Chicago to retire."

Joseph Goforth of Southwest Development Services spoke on behalf of the owner, Greg Kruger. He said the live entertainment would be "diner-appropriate" and comparable to a piano bar. The restaurant won't be booking bands to perform rock-and-roll shows, he said.

Goforth also said the request stipulates that the live entertainment would be confined to inside the restaurant and wouldn't be carried over exterior speakers.

"So there won't be any Twisted Sister at the Twisted Lizard," Commission Chairman Michael D'Andrea said.