



Village Planning Committee Meeting Summary

GPA-AL-1-20-5

Date of VPC Meeting	September 22, 2020
Request From	PUD (258.36 acres), P-2 (4.99 acres), R1-6 (8.54 acres), R1-6 (Approved R-3) (1.04 acres), R-3 (11.13 acres), R-3A (0.42 acres), R-4 (1.42 acres), C-1 (0.45 acres), C-2 (3.85 acres), and C-3 (5.87 acres)
Request	A major amendment to the Grand Canyon University Planned Unit Development (PUD) to add additional property to the PUD and modify the PUD standards
Location	An area generally bounded by 35th Avenue to I-17, and Missouri Avenue to Camelback Road; plus a property approximately 130 feet east of the southeast corner of 27th Avenue and Camelback Road; and a property at the southwest corner of 29th Avenue and Camelback Road
VPC Recommendation	Approve as recommended by staff
VPC Vote	10-2-0

VPC DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDED STIPULATIONS:

5 virtual speaker cards were received, 5 wishing to speak, with 4 in support and 1 in opposition.

At this time, Ammon joined the meeting bringing the quorum to 13 members (10 being required for a quorum).

Chair McCabe, staff, explained that Items 4 and 5 on the agenda both pertain to the proposed expansion of the Grand Canyon University (GCU) Campus and that, to avoid repetition, the staff and applicant presentations will cover both items, that public comments and applicant responses will cover both items, and that the items will conclude with two separate recommendations.

STAFF PRESENTATION

Klimek, staff, explained that the proposed expansion of GCU requires two separation actions – first, an amendment to the Phoenix General Plan Land Use Map which provides high-level policy guidance on the types of land use envisioned on a parcel-by-parcel basis throughout the corporate limits and second, an amendment to the existing Planned Unit Development that regulates development throughout the campus. With few exceptions, zoning must be consistent with the General Plan Land Use Map; as such, Item 4 proposes that all property being added to the GCU PUD be designed as Public / Quasi Public prior to the request for zoning.

GCU created a PUD to govern the development and regulations of its campus in 2010 with approximately 100 acres. The original PUD has been amended three times since the original approval and the current request (Item 5) is for approximately 296 acres of land generally bounded by Interstate-17, 35th Avenue, Camelback Road, and Missouri Avenue with few exceptions.

Regarding the request for a General Plan Amendment (Item 4), 31.06 acres are being requested to change from assorted commercial and residential designations to Public / Quasi-Public. The proposed request supports the Core Values of the Phoenix General Plan related to education and training and support for entrepreneurship and emerging enterprises; as such, staff is recommending approval for Item 4.

Regarding the request to amend the Planned Unit Development (Item 5), the proposed amendment preserves many elements from previous amendments such as development standards, height, and design guidelines. Notable changes include the following:

- Permitted Uses and Land Use Categories. The list of permitted uses has been refined and expanded to allow for additional flexibility on the GCU Campus. Two new use categories have been added to preserve some of the existing entitlements for the properties zoned C-2 and C-3 that are being added to the PUD as a means of not creating non-conforming uses.
- Height Incentive Area. The narrative now includes a height incentive area that, subject to use restrictions in addition to design and site development standards, would permit a maximum height of 135 feet. Located at the northwest corner of Interstate 17 and Camelback Road, the incentive area would promote the creation of a campus gateway and community-oriented asset.
- Shade and Detached Sidewalks. The narrative requires new development along sections of Missouri Avenue, Camelback Road, 35th Avenue, and 27th Avenue to create shaded and detached sidewalks. Additionally, the narrative includes a regulatory shade exhibit depicting 13,000 square feet of architectural shade.
- Signage. The narrative includes provisions to allow the addition of one ground level monument sign on the site of the Kingdom Hall, the addition of banner signs founded on the palm trees along Camelback Road, and one wall mounted digital display board along the east elevation of a new building located on the northwest corner of Camelback Road and the 31st Avenue alignment.

Through shade, detached sidewalks, support for alternative transportation, and the creation of attractive streetscapes, the request to amend the PUD advances the

purpose and intent of the Tree and Shade Master Plan, the Complete Streets Guidelines, and the “27th Avenue To Do List.” Through the creation of a mixed-use campus and the addition of housing options, the request to amend the PUD advances the purpose and intent of the Freeway Specific Plan and the HousingPHX Plan.

The request to amend the PUD would consolidate and redevelop several smaller parcels into one larger development, be compatible and appropriately buffered from the surrounding area through landscape and building setbacks and would bring additional educational opportunities to area residents. As such, staff is recommending approval subject to stipulations with the following being of note:

- Add a statement regarding future consideration of the Enhanced C-3 Use Category in the next PUD to adjust for potential changes coming to the 27th Avenue Corridor.
- Eliminate language that would allow banners to be mounted on palm trees
- Additional criteria for the east facing digital display board
- Requiring a Traffic Impact Study or Statement

APPLICANT PRESENTATION

Taylor Earl, of Earl & Curley representing GCU, provided an overview of the history of the PUD, GCU’s positive impact on the immediate community and larger economy, and the content of the Planned Unit Development. GCU employs more than 6,400 employees, is one of the largest employers in the west valley, and creates approximately \$1.1B in economic activity annually. The GCU PUD, first adopted in 2010, had served the exact intent of the Planned Unit Development Zoning District; it has provided the flexibility for GCU to develop, expand, and adapt in a manner that has allowed the campus to thrive by allowing for custom development standard and use permissions.

GCU has invested \$1.5B into educational infrastructure since 2008 and its campus is one of the most diverse communities in the nation. Tuition rates have been frozen since 12 years with traditional students paying an average of \$8,700 per year.

Notable additions include the addition of shade standards including a mix of vegetative and architectural shade throughout the campus, the addition of a bicycle program, upgrades to three bus pads to current standards, and detached sidewalks along 27th Avenue to aide in the enhancement of the corridor as envisioned by community leaders such as Jeff Spellman.

The PUD has helped GCU being recognized as having the 6th Best College Dorms in American (of 1,384) and as having the 19th Best College Campus in America (of 1,417). The campus also provides multiple community benefits to the area and the region including free tutoring for high school students through the learning lounge, the largest Habitat for Humanity partnership in the nation, and the GCU Arena and Event Center.

GCU is asking for a few amendments to the staff recommendation related to the following:

- **Palm Tree Banners.** Whereas staff is recommending no palm-mounted banners, GCU is asking the Village to reconsider the aesthetic with the condition that the

banners can be mounted on every third tree with approximately 90 – 100 feet of spacing between banners. Under the current PUD, pole mounted banners would be permitted but GCU does not like the aesthetic and feels it would detract from the historic streetscape which has mature palm trees. Staff had assembled a series of conditions should the Village elect to recommend the palm aesthetic and GCU is generally agreeable to those conditions.

- **Digital Display Board.** The staff stipulation adds some conditions to the location and operation of the digital display board proposed at the northwest corner of the 31st Avenue alignment and Camelback Road. GCU is asking the Village to reconsider the language in this stipulation to allow for additional promotion of community-oriented events. The sign would face due-east to protect the neighbors to the south which is already reflected in the staff stipulations. The current stipulation references Section 705.C.13 which contains a requirement that the sign would need to be spaced a minimum of 100' of flashing warning signs for crosswalks, train crossings, fire stations, and etc.); the proposed location would be within 100' of a crosswalk and GCU is therefore asking for relief from that provision in addition to removing the condition that a Use Permit be required and reducing the minimum separation from the corner of the building from 5 feet to 2 feet.
- **Temporary Tents.** GCU is asking the Village to allow the addition of temporary tent structures by right on the GCU Campus. Without this addition, GCU would need to request a permit every time they want to hold a wedding or special event on their 300 acre campus; this requirement only recently came to light.

COMMITTEE QUESTIONS:

Adams stated that the request makes sense but asked how the neighborhoods and businesses has responded to the proposal and how the proposal impacts police and fire capacity and response times. **Earl** responded that the PUD contains development standards such as setbacks and stepbacks to protect adjacent property values. He noted that they have held two neighborhood meetings through this process and that generally the response has been positive with a few attendees inquiring whether GCU would like to purchase their properties. He explained that rarely do neighbors attend a meeting in supportive or neutral on a topic. GCU has campus police officers and has a long-partnership with the Phoenix Police Department and both expand proportionate to growth.

Becker inquired regarding plans to expand and whether GCU is actively pursuing property acquisition. **Earl** responded that it may be appropriate to describe efforts as being interested in property acquisition but not necessarily being in active pursuit; they do have a real estate broker to evaluate inquiries and facilitate discussions, but the process is not pro-active at this time.

Williams drew the distinction between prevention and pro-active policing with the former focusing on community-investment compared to the latter focusing on incarceration. **Earl** explained that the Habitat for Humanity partnership is the largest in the nation raising \$3.5M and renovating more than 300 homes; in that relationship, Habitat for Humanity provides the expertise and GCU provides the volunteers and the money. GCU provides empowerment through education including the learning lounge which provides free tutoring. These efforts are in addition to the on-campus police, partnership with the Phoenix Police Department, and CPTED principles in place on the

campus; Earl noted that these programs and partnerships have been very successful and have been developed in collaboration with neighborhood leaders through the Violence Impact Project. **Williams** stated that GCU should seek to reduce its reliance on pro-active policing and its partnership with the Phoenix Police Department.

Keyser stated that he was involved in curb-appeal projects in the area where they would identify run-down and vacant properties, often owned by elderly residents, and clean up those properties. The program then evolved to include a partnership with the Neighborhood Services Department and the Phoenix Police Department where the PD would contact the owners and offer their assistance. He stated that this partnership, which may still be operating or may have been subsumed by the Habitat for Humanity partnership, is a great example of crime-prevention and the “broken windows theory of policing.”

He then read a letter from a concerned resident expressing concern over the shallow setbacks along the Little Canyon Trail; he echoed the sentiments of the letter and expressed further concern over the 0 foot setback along Little Canyon Park. He asked Earl if GCU would be willing to delay to allow for additional study of these topics. **Earl** responded that GCU is on a tight schedule and cannot delay but that there are no plans for the redevelopment of existing buildings along the Little Canyon Trail.

Sanchez asked Earl to be more specific about the properties being added to the PUD south of Camelback Road. Are there plans to develop these properties? Are there plans to acquire more properties south of Camelback Road? She also asked for more detail on the Traffic Impact Study. **Earl** responded that there are no current plans for the sites, that there are no active plans to acquire more property, and that the traffic impact study will examine the traffic generated by the campus and provide recommendations for what traffic investments should be required.

Sanchez noted that the intersection of 31st Avenue and Camelback Road is dangerous. She asked if any additional neighborhood meetings were held and if any highlight rose from the discussion. **Earl** responded that an additional neighborhood meeting was held and that there were two attendees including one from the District 5 Council Office with an assortment of questions and no major concerns.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Daniel Valenzuela (support) introduced himself as a former City Council member but stated that he is in attendance as a citizen and expressed his support for GCU and the GCU PUD. GCU is an asset to the community and creates \$1B in investment annually for the community. Additionally, GCU has been a major participant in the Violence Impact Project and many other partnerships that have helped to strengthen their immediate area and the city. The investments made by GCU go beyond bricks and mortar – they are investing in the youth, the people, and the neighborhood and he then asked for the committee to vote in support.

Karina Recamier (support) introduced herself and spoke about her experience as a Students Inspiring Students (SIS) Scholarship Recipient and as a resident of the GCU Area. She grew up in Maryvale but attended Alhambra High School. GCU and its learning lounge does a lot to support the youth in the region and the immediate area.

She works as a lead in the learning lounge and the SIS program focuses on community support and volunteerism.

Nicholas Monte (support) introduced himself as a GCU Alumni, resident, and homeowner in the area. He explained that all GCU does is overwhelmingly positive including its support for education, safety, and employment. About 8 years ago, the area was not safe but over the past 4 years the area has become much safer due in large part to GCU and its partnership with the Phoenix Police Department and helps support small businesses and strong neighborhoods.

Brian Holman (support) submitted a virtual speaker card but was unavailable or could not be found in the virtual meeting.

Gail Palmer (opposed) stated that if there were two meetings, he was only made aware of one. He thanked Jak Keyser for his instrumental role in making Little Canyon Trail become a reality. He expressed concern over GCU's unwillingness to abide by agreements and zoning stipulations including one which restricted access through a cul-de-sac to pedestrians only. He stated that many people in the neighborhood are not happy with GCU because they control the city and are allowed to do whatever they wish. He then expressed concern over a diagram that depicted a share of the trail being included in the zoning case.

APPLICANT RESPONSE

Earl thanked the speakers for their contributions. Regarding the ownership of the Little Canyon Trail, a zoning case is always measured to the center of adjacent right of way so the issue raised by Mr. Palmer is a zoning technicality. With any major investment, he noted that there will always be disagreements but asked the committee to vote in support of the requests because of the great things that GCU has done in the past for the neighborhood, the city, and the region.

MOTION, DISCUSSION, AND VOTE.

Sanchez asked Earl to confirm whether GCU is still interested in acquiring the Little Canyon Trail and the Little Canyon Park. **Earl** responded that GCU and the City had completed some due diligence to explore opportunities but those stalled and GCU currently has no interest in acquiring those properties. Security remains a major concern related to the Little Canyon Trail which is open all night and GCU would continue to explore nighttime closures to enhance the security of their campus. Over the years, GCU has invested in improving the quality of the trail including tree plantings and the creation of convenient trail parking.

Sanchez stated that she had asked Earl for police data from the VIP Coalition at the Information Only Presentation but had not received anything to date. **Earl** responded that GCU prepared a letter to members of the committee that was sent by staff several days prior. He offered to send the letter directly to Sanchez.

Sanchez introduced the story raised by Ochoa-Martinez at the Information Only Presentation where after the multifamily complex where she lived was acquired by GCU, she was given only 15 days to find alternative housing and to relocate. She asked

the members of the committee to vote no on the proposed revisions to the staff recommendation – no on banners, no on electronic signage, and no on tents.

Williams expressed concern over the impact of GCU on the surrounding area which is inhabited by people with socioeconomic disadvantages and minorities; he noted that “pro-active” policing in such an area inevitable produces higher incarceration rates of minorities.

--- **From Item 5 (Z-3-D-10-5)** --- **Jones** stated that GCU is a major asset within the City of Phoenix, has had a profoundly positive impact on the community and West Camelback area, and that many of the issues raised tonight were both minor and fixable. Everyone in this area is well aware of GCU, their plans for continued expansion, and knows how to contact their leadership and legal representation. Regarding the digital display board, the sign will face due east so there will not be light impacts on residents south of Camelback Road. Regarding the banners, it will be more impactful to install them on the palm trees than on light poles where the message tends to disappear into the street-scene. Regarding the temporary tents, it is not reasonable for GCU to complete a 6 week process for every small event they would like to hold on their campus.

MOTION:

Jones made a motion to approve the request per the staff recommendation. **LeBlanc** seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION

VOTE: 10-2-0, motion passes with members McCabe, Jones, Ender, Krietor, Fitzgerald, Smith, Adams, Becker, LeBlanc, and in favor; Williams, Sanchez and in dissent; and none in abstention.

During this vote, Keyser was unavailable but still in attendance.

STAFF COMMENTS REGARDING VPC RECOMMENDATION:

Z-3-D-10-5 was heard together with its companion General Plan Amendment (GPA-AL-1-20-5); however, separate actions were made.