

# Messenger

NEWS FOR PHOENIX'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

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## 'Country Club' plan continued

Proposed project gets new hearing date; talks with opponents intensify

BY DAVID TELL, MESSENGER EDITOR

**A**pparently fearing disapproval of their project at City Council, the developers of a proposed Country Club Homes complex at 7th Street and Earll got a continuance of their requested rezoning to Dec. 3, from its scheduled hearing Oct. 15.

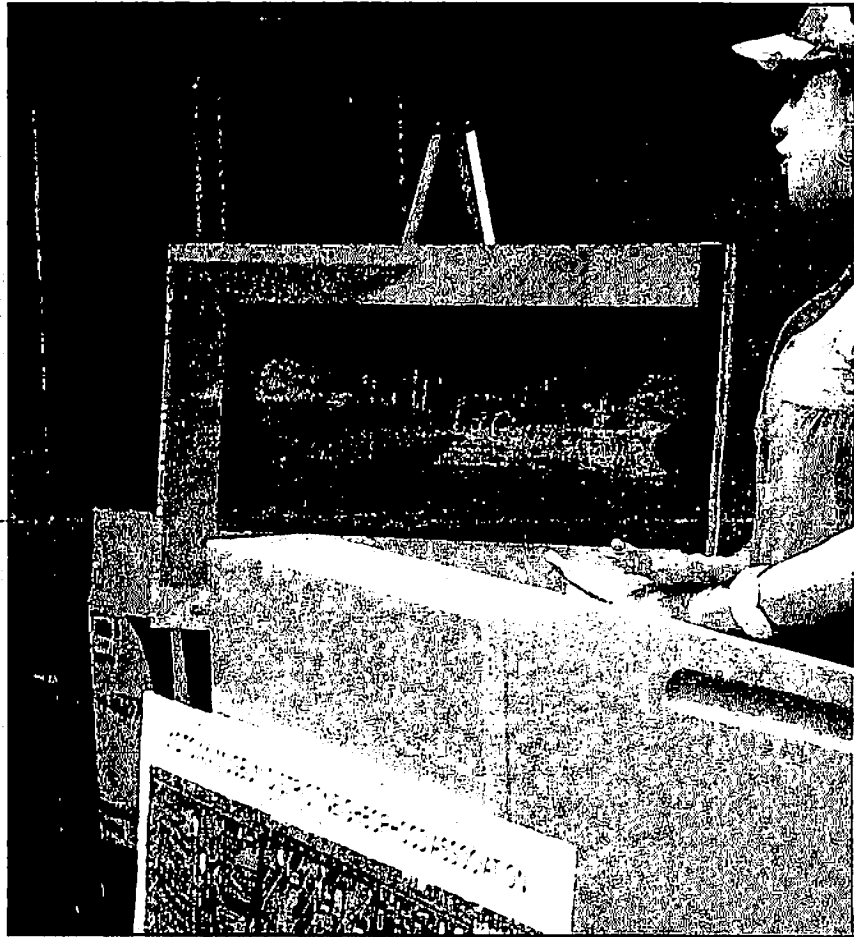
Opponent Robert Warnicke, an attorney and resident of the adjacent La Hacienda Historic District said "I believe so" when asked if he thought developer Jim Hill had been advised by District 4 Councilman Tom Simplot to take the additional time to seriously negotiate compromises with the neighbors.

Warnicke and fellow project opponent Tom Chauncey, also an attorney, met with Simplot about the project on Oct. 1. "He didn't change his position," Warnicke said. "He was recently quoted in the *Republic* consistent with everything he's already told us of his support for the neighborhood—that he does not support the PUD [proposed planned unit development] as written. He used to live in our neighborhood."

"I ultimately agreed to the continuance—the developer finally got around to beginning to negotiate with us in the last week or so," Warnicke said. The developer's attorney "Mr. Curley just couldn't get it done. He would promise us written stipulations and new site plans. Some stipulations are things that were first offered six months ago but were never put in writing.

"It's been frustrating for us to deal with him," Warnicke added. "Because Mr. Hill has never negotiated with us, to the extent we have been doing negotiations, it's been with the attorney: 'If you give us this,

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Dorina Bustamante, project leader of the 3rd Street Promenade Project, gives attendees of the Midtown Museum District Neighborhood Association's first meeting a glimpse of ideas for improving the streetscape and pedestrian-friendliness of an area between 3rd and 7th Streets. The city-provided map of the incipient Midtown Museum District is seen leaning against the table.

## It's merit by association

BY DAVID TELL, MESSENGER EDITOR

**T**he new Midtown Museum District Neighborhood Association held its first meeting Sept. 24, with good attendance by interested community members. A series of

speakers gave presentations on the meeting's agenda, including the role of the local health department, the role of the local police precincts, and the role of the local neighborhood association. The meeting was presented by Alton Brown, neighborhood association president, and Alton Brown, neighborhood association president.

## DEVELOPMENT

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I'll try to get this from Mr. Hill.' They couldn't get things done and back to us. It's always been a step removed."

Warnicke said things began to change in the days leading up to the scheduled Oct. 15 hearing.

"I had a conversation with Mr. Curley, told him it might be possible to get a compromise, but 'you haven't given us time to do it,'" he said. "We tried to work to get a compromise; we can't agree on a lot of things, but we're closer. I understand Mr. Curley went to Tom Simplot's office, I assume he begged for a continuance. Tom called me and Tom Chauncey personally, explained how it would be better for the neighborhood to have some development on this property than for this thing to get killed ... I'm paraphrasing. Tom thought would be beneficial to have opportunity to have this worked out."

Like longtime La Hacienda resident Jean Switzer, Warnicke agrees that there would be benefit from redevelopment of the property.

"I would like to see that property redeveloped," he said. "Ideally it

could be done within the zoning 288 units. There are 221 now; they're asking for 430."

Warnicke countered comments made by Curley in an article on the development in the September *Midtown Messenger*.

"In part, my frustration is that he keeps representing that we neighbors won't agree to everything, that they keep coming to us with proposals and we won't agree to anything. I find that really annoying," Warnicke said. "The original proposal was for a 15- to 16-story tower, about 397 \$1 million units. Then the market turns and they changed plans, not because we opposed it—building tall buildings like that is very expensive. So they came back with 430 units, 400,000 square feet, the Urban Residential [zoned] proposal. They say, 'We reduced the height to make neighbors happy, to seven stories, four and five stories on Catalina.' At the same time that they moved from a 15-story plan to three 'urban castles'—three buildings with four-five-seven story elements—they increased unit density while decreasing the size of each dwelling unit. Originally we were getting 397 millionaires as neighbors. Now, the average unit size was going to be less than 900

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square feet—efficiencies, studios ... I don't want to sound like a snob, but I'm concerned I'm going to be living next to an instant slum.

"The urban castle problem, it's four towers basically surrounding the parking structure—the city lets them consider that open space—but completely isolated from the neighborhood. The way they're surrounded by their towers, they're getting the benefit of the open space, while I'm losing open space. They should be using open space as a buffer. We want some distance between us and them as a transition. They could do it if they weren't building an urban castle, but they're cheap to build."

Warnicke said Chauncey discovered the property is under financial pressure, with a "Promissory note that was due in June, with possible extension to December 2008." He said he didn't know if Council might be more inclined to approve the project given that pressure: "Now Council may be frantically afraid that a bank is going to end up owning it by foreclosure" if the rezoning doesn't proceed. Conversely, Council might fear OKing it and then seeing it fall through financially anyway, perhaps after the existing apartments are razed—the situation of the proposed Encanto Parkside project at 1302 W. McDowell Rd. "I don't know which way it cuts," War-

nicke said.

Warnicke also said he didn't believe Simplot's new employment as director of the Arizona Multihousing Association was likely to affect his stance on behalf of the neighborhood. According to a report, there was speculation Simplot might not run for his Council seat again next year due to the job, but has decided to seek re-election. The association is said to represent "215,000 rental units and the developers that build them."

"My feeling is Tom Simplot is going to treat his constituents fairly and correctly, is not going to do anything to harm us to impress his new employer. He's worth a lot less to his new employer is if he does burn bridges with his constituents," Warnicke said. "His value is in his integrity."

Warnicke ended conceding that what's best for his small neighborhood may not be best for the city at large. "Even if I end up sideways with Tom, that doesn't mean it's not the right result for the city." On the other hand, he said, larger historic neighborhoods such as Willo are better able to withstand big adjacent developments, such as high-rises along Central Avenue, while La Hacienda, consisting of two streets of homes, is at greater risk from a potentially overwhelming project such as the one proposed.

The city's Historic Preservation Office filed comments with Planning opposing the project's proposed heights so close to the vulnerable historic neighborhood. ■