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# MEMORANDUM

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Date: May 25, 2022

To: The Honorable Chair and Members  
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: Jan Leshner   
County Administrator

Re: **Update on Interest in Potentially Acquiring the Property Located on Cortaro Farms Road near Oldfather Drive**

In a [February 15, 2022](#) Memorandum to the Board of Supervisors, I said I had provided direction to Real Property Services (RPS) to obtain an appraisal of the referenced property. Accordingly, I am providing copies of two appraisals indicating a range of value based on two different potential development assumptions. Further, included in this Memorandum is additional information on the habitat protection priority of the property and its landscape connectivity in the northwest area. An update is also provided on verbal communications with the property owner regarding the appraisal findings and my recommendation on further pursuit of possible acquisition.

## Background

The property totals 57.6 acres that was assembled in three separate parcel transactions between the dates of June 11, 2020 and January 7, 2022. The total purchase price was \$2,988,000. The property was purchased for development of a residential subdivision; however, none of the purchases included any contingencies regarding change of zoning or establishment of development entitlements. The owners worked with Project International, Inc. to prepare a combined Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Specific Plan request (P21SP00001).

The Pima County Planning & Zoning Commission recommended denial of the proposal. The request was scheduled for Board of Supervisors consideration on November 16, 2021. The item was withdrawn by the property owners prior to the Board meeting due to significant opposition to the proposal, which triggered the requirement of a needed "super majority" vote of the Board to approve the proposal.

## Appraisal Reports

The appraisals performed considered two different development scenarios: 1) existing "As Is" zoning; and 2) an "As if Rezoned" condition with 45 percent of the site developed for 115 residential lots.

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The "As Is" appraisal report (Attachment 1) estimates a value based on the current SR (Suburban Ranch) zoning. The appraisal estimates that 17 SR lots can be developed on the 57.6 acres using a cluster option to reduce development costs. The appraisal opines a value of \$1,190,000, or \$70,000 per lot.

The "As if Rezoned" appraisal report (Attachment 2) estimates a value based on an assumption that the property owner could successfully amend the Pima County Comprehensive Plan and rezone the property to allow 45 percent of the total 57.6 acres to be developed with an estimated 115 residential lots. The density of the development would be 4.5 residences per acre on the usable portion, leaving 55 percent of the site as undisturbed set-aside land. The appraisal opines a value of \$3,507,500, or \$30,500 per lot.

#### Habitat Protection Priority Designation

Habitat Protection Priorities (HPP) were first adopted by the Board in June 2004 following recommendations presented by the Steering Committee for the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP). In planning for the 2015 Conservation Bond Program, the original HPPs along with a list of recommended changes from a Board-appointed Conservation Acquisition Committee (CAC) were accepted by the Board of Supervisors. There was explicit acknowledgment in both the 2004 and 2015 Conservation Bonds that the allotted funding, if approved, was insufficient to secure all identified HPPs.

While the 2015 Conservation Bond Program was not approved by voters, the 2015 HPP designations remain the most current priorities and continue to inform potential conservation acquisitions and implementation of the Multi-species Conservation Plan (MSCP). The designated HPPs can be accessed on SDCP PimaMaps at this [link](#). From the main map page, select the Bond Programs header in the layer list. Then select the layer for the 2004 Conservation Bond Program or 2015 Conservation Bond Program and the Habitat Protection Priorities category of interest. Office of Sustainability and Conservation staff can provide assistance with accessing this information, if needed.

The Cortaro 57 property was initially prioritized for protection as a Highest Priority Private - Habitat Protection Priority in 2004 and was reaffirmed in 2015; the designation continues to apply today. The property lies within the Maeveen Marie Behan Conservation Land System's (CLS) Multiple Use Management Area and Special Species Management Area categories.

#### Landscape Connectivity

The Cortaro 57 property is one of the few HPPs south of Arthur Pack Park and the only HPP south of Cortaro Farms Road. The property provides a local connectivity linkage between two County-owned conservation parcels and Arthur Pack Park approximately a half-mile to the northeast. The attached maps (Attachment 3) show the change in residential subdivision density in the vicinity of the subject property since 2005. This growth of surrounding

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subdivisions isolate the property and detract from its connectivity to the regional landscape; however the local connectivity linkages remain important.

In fact, the value of this local linkage influenced the 2019 completed widening of Cortaro Farms Road west of Thornydale Road. A culvert that accommodates drainage and wildlife use was installed at a single location in the vicinity of Quail Run Elementary School creating a de facto underpass. Wildlife common to the area such as coyote, javelina, and bobcats are funneled to this underpass through a combination of 5-foot high exclusionary fencing and sound walls running parallel to the north side of the road.

#### Discussions with Property Owner

Prior to completion of any appraisal, the property owner indicated to our RPS Director that they were not interested in selling the subject property at the currently zoned value, and that they had received other offers above their original purchase price. Upon receipt of the completed "As Is" and "As if Rezoned" appraisals, our RPS Director spoke with the property owner who indicated that they are not interested in selling at either appraised value. The property owner again stated that they have received multiple unsolicited higher value purchase offers from other interested parties. I have sent a letter to the property owner requesting a written response on their position on a potential sale to Pima County including their estimation of value ideally supported by a valid appraisal (Attachment 4).

#### Summary & Recommendation

The subject property is identified as a Highest Priority Private – Habitat Protection Priority and contains valuable habitat and conservation resources that provide a local connectivity linkage between other County-owned conservation properties in the vicinity. The completed appraisals provide an opinion of value ranging between \$1,190,000 based on existing zoning and \$3,507,500 assuming rezoning to allow 4.5 residences per acre on 45 percent of the property and leaving 55 percent as natural open space.

The property owner has verbally indicated in the last week that they are not interested in selling the property at the appraised values. They have further indicated they have received higher purchase offers. While no specific details have been provided on these offers, it is presumed that any offer would be predicated on rezoning to a higher density than assumed in the appraisal.

Given that the previous rezoning request, which proposed development of approximately 75 percent of the property with around 25 percent on-site open space and additional off-site mitigation, was withdrawn due to significant opposition from area residents and the local conservation community, it appears highly unlikely that this proposal or something similar in density would be able to obtain rezoning approval in Pima County. Similarly, prior representations that the property owner may pursue annexation into the Town of Marana in

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order to rezone the property have been countered by indications from the Town that annexation of the property does not fit their annexation objectives.

While it may be theoretically possible to rezone the property to increase the development density in the future, and therefore increase the appraised market value, at this point the property can only be developed at the existing SR zoning, which would result in substantial conservation of the habitat value of the property. As such, and based on the owners verbally stated unwillingness to consider purchase even at the higher "As if Rezoned" appraisal value, I have sent a letter asking for a written indication of the owner's position. I will update the Board upon receipt of a response.

JKL/dym

Attachment

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works  
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,  
Health and Community Services  
Yves Khawam, PhD, Assistant County Administrator for Public Works  
Linda Mayro, Director, Office of Sustainability and Conservation  
Jeff Teplitzky, Director, Real Property Services Department  
Nicole Fyffe, Executive Assistant to the County Administrator