MEMORANDUM

Date: December 13, 2021

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
From: Jan Lesher, Acting County Administrator

Pima County Board of Supervisors

Re: Interest in Potential Acquisition of Property Located on Cortaro Farms Road near Oldfather Drive

Background

The Board of Supervisors was recently set to consider a land use change on parcels located on the south side of Cortaro Farms Road, west of Oldfather Drive. The Specific Plan and Comprehensive Plan Amendment, submitted by Cortaro 15, LLC, was continued from the November 16, 2021 Board Meeting to the December 7, 2021 Meeting. The proposed zoning change was met with significant community opposition due to detrimental impacts to the site conservation values, thereby requiring a super-majority vote of the Board in order to approve the request. On November 24, 2021, a project representative formally withdrew the request for the Specific Plan and Comprehensive Plan Amendment.

Discussion

Based on the site conservation values and community opposition to the proposal to increase development of the properties, Supervisor Scott has requested information to evaluate the potential for Pima County to acquire the parcels. Supervisor Grijalva has also expressed similar interest. In response to the requests, the attached information from the Pima County Office of Sustainability and Conservation has been provided. As noted, the site lies within the Maeveen Marie Behan Conservation Lands System and carries conservation designations including Multi-use Management Area and Special Species Management Area.

Over 1,300 ironwood trees and 800 saguaros have been documented on the site. The site is also within the Priority Conservation Area for the Cactus ferruginous pygmy owl and was identified as a “Highest Priority Private” acquisition in the 2004 Open Space Bond Program. The site located directly northeast of a County-owned Preserve and provides a linkage for wildlife movement to the County-owned Arthur Pack Regional Park approximately a half-mile to the northeast.

In addition to the conservation value information, the Pima County Real Property Service Department was asked to provide details on the recent sales for the subject properties. There are four parcels that comprise the approximately 58.31 acre site:

- Cortaro Farms 15, LLC – Tax Parcel #225-33-059R
- Horizon Church – Tax Parcel #225-33-059M
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- ACM Ventures, LLC – Tax Parcel Number #221-16-029E
- Douglas Craig, LLC – Tax Parcel #221-16-029D

Real Property’s research into recent transactions for these properties identified the following:

- Cortaro Farms 15, LLC – June, 2020 for a recorded amount of $560,000, or $37,086 per acre.
- Horizon Church – No recent sale.
- ACM Ventures, LLC – August, 2021 for a recorded amount of $1,970,000, or $54,434 per acre.
- Douglas Craig, LLC - Deeded to Douglas Craig, LLC, from ACM Ventures, LLC as of August, 2021 (Douglas Craig, LLC includes ACM Ventures, LLC)

The combined purchase price for the two recent sales (Cortaro Farms 15, LLC and ACM Ventures, LLC) totals $2,530,000 or $49,327 per acre (not including the Horizon Church property). Based on the combined purchase price of the two recent sales, the price paid reflects an anticipated change in use to a higher density since $49,327 per acre is above the per acre price that a prudent and knowledgeable purchaser would pay for the existing SR zoning. It is the professional opinion of Real Property Services that an estimated range based on market values for SR zoned property and assuming no zoning change is as follows:

- 18 lots x 3.31 acres per lot x $20,000 per acre = $1,191,600
- 18 lots x 3.31 acres per lot x $30,000 per acre = $1,787,400

The estimates are merely preliminary range projections by Real Property Services based on publically available information and professional judgement. The estimates are not based on actual appraisals and therefore are not intended as, nor should they be construed as, appraised values.

Conclusion

Despite the difference in value between the recent sales price for the parcels and the County’s estimate based on the existing SR zoning, I am directing Real Property Services Director Jeff Teplitksy to contact the property owners to inquire about their interest in potentially selling the parcels to Pima County. I will provide an update to the Board on potential next steps once we’ve heard from the property owners.

JL/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
Jeff Teplitksy, Director, Real Property Services Department
Date: December 3, 2021

To: Carmine DeBonis, Deputy County Administrator, Public Works

From: Linda Mayro, Director

RE: Cortaro Farms Properties – Conservation Values

The following responds to your request for an evaluation of the conservation values of the Cortaro Farms properties (Figure 1.) and is excerpted from comments OSC originally provided for inclusion in the staff report for P21SP00001, Cortaro Farms 15, L.L.C., et al. - W. Cortaro Farms Road Specific Plan and Comprehensive Plan Amendment. Summarizing, there are no known cultural resource on the site and its conservation values are largely limited to the on-site saguaros; contributions to wildlife movement are more localized than regional.

Figure 1. Location Map. Subject site outlined in red; County Preserves in green; Town of Marana in orange.
SITE CONSERVATION VALUES

- The vast majority of the approx. 57-acre project site lies within the Maeveen Marie Conservation Lands System (CLS). Approx. 46 acres is within the Multi-Use Management Area designation; approx. 55 acres is designated as a Special Species Management Area (SSMA).

- A total of 1,320 ironwoods and 827 saguaros have been documented on the project site. Of the 827 saguaros, 142 are less than six feet tall and 685 are six feet or taller, including 141 giant saguaros measuring 18’ or taller. Approximately 50% of the 141 giant saguaros are more than 25’ tall. According to the Specific Plan application, 102 of the 141 giant saguaros measuring 18’ or taller are viable specimens; only 39 were found to be non-viable. As noted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), “These parcels have significant ironwood and saguaro resources that not only have value to the pygmy-owl but is also a sensitive and valuable vegetation community.”

- The site is within the Priority Conservation Area (PCA) for the Cactus ferruginous pygmy owl; it is outside the PCAs for the Western burrowing owl, Pima pineapple cactus, and Needle-spined pineapple cactus.

- The site was identified for acquisition as “Highest Priority Private” under the 2004 Open Space Bond Program.

- There are no cultural resources recorded on the property.

LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

The subject properties are located in an area of Northwest Tucson that is largely urbanized, with medium-intensity residential development located to the south, east, west, and northwest. A block of low-intensity residential development is located to the northeast. The Town of Marana’s boundary is adjacent to the west boundary of the project site.

The site is located directly northeast of and adjacent to a County-owned Preserve and is approx. ½ mile southwest of Arthur Pack Regional Park. It is not within any identified wildlife movement area or critical landscape connection and because of the largely urbanized setting it is unlikely the project site provides a significant contribution to landscape connectivity at a regional level.

However, the project site, in conjunction with the block of low-density development to the northeast, does provide a linkage between the adjacent Preserve and Arthur Pack Regional Park and it likely facilitates local wildlife movement between these two habitat blocks. Per the USFWS, this localized linkage “provides a habitat corridor important for movements of wildlife in general, and the lesser long-nosed bat and pygmy-owl specifically,” both of which are species covered under the County’s Multi-Species Conservation Plan.