

Zoning commission wants out of plat process

It's no picnic getting development plats through the grindingly slow pace of government procedures, but Pima County is trying something different.

Instead of waiting the usual 30 days for a tentative plat to make its way from the technical staff review to the county's planning and zoning commission, after which time the plat heads for the Board of Supervisors, the commission plans to axe itself from the process.

Members of the planning and zoning commission last Wednesday unanimously approved an ordinance that would let tentative plats sail past them, straight from the staff's review to the supervisors.

Why were they willing to relinquish their authority over development plans in the county? Because that authority is basically meaningless, says commission member and real estate broker **Bill Arnold** of **Genesis Real Estate and Development Inc.**

"We've been rubber stamps," he said.

When the commission makes a recommendation on plats, it relies on a highly technical review by county staff, said Mr. Arnold.

Members, who don't have the technical know-how required to critique plats, usually sign off on development plans because staff has already made sure they meet the necessary requirements, said Mr. Arnold.



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By skipping over the commission's rubber stamp, the developer may save 30 days of governmental red tape, he said.

"It will speed up the process," said Mr. Arnold.

Even before the 1996 election, **Jim Mazzocco**, a Pima County planning official, said staff and the commission were "massaging this area of the code."

Developers and builders say the county's planning process is a grueling one.

Robert Sharpe, who has worked with Pima County on developments by **Sharpe & Associates**, said zoning and platting can each take six months to a year.

After two years of work with the county, it could be 18 to 36 months before a developer starts the first lot, he said.

"With the roller-coaster cycles we have here, you could start in a good market and end in a bad market," said Mr. Sharpe. "Anything that saves time is an advantage."

The tentative-plat amendment approved last week deletes a portion that drew criticism from Mr. Arnold.

That segment would have allowed appeals "by any person aggrieved by the decision" within 30 days of a decision by the county subdivision and development review committee, according to a draft of the ordinance.

Mr. Mazzocco said the appeals mechanism was added to create as fair a system as possible.

But Mr. Arnold said the appeal would open the door to further delays and possibly the defeat of legitimate plats.

"Troublemakers can use this (appeals provision) to take a bite out of the developer," he said.

Without the appeals mechanism, the tentative plat amendment is a timesaver for the developer, said Mr. Arnold.

Asked if the revised measure blocks public input, he said there has been little public participation in the platting process. Rezoning hearings are where the public makes its voice known, he said.

The planning and zoning commission's streamlined process, however, is far from finalized.

The Board of Supervisors still has to consider the new procedure for reviewing plats, and some observers say there's a chance board members will want the public appeals provision in the final ordinance.

"I hope the Board of Supervisors sees fit to hear and approve" the tentative-plat amendment supported by the commission last week, said Mr. Arnold.