



***Environmental
Planning
Commission***

***Agenda Number: 02
Project Number: 1008444
Case #s: 10EPC-40045
July 7, 2011***

Supplemental Staff Report

<i>Agent</i>	COA, Planning Department
<i>Applicant</i>	City of Albuquerque
<i>Request(s)</i>	Recommend Adoption of the Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan
<i>Legal Description</i>	See attached map
<i>Location</i>	Area boundaries are the Petroglyph National Monument to the east, Paseo del Norte to the south, Universe to the west and Paseo del Norte and the Town of Alameda Grant line to the north.
<i>Size</i>	Approximately 570 acres
<i>Existing Zoning</i>	RD, SU-1 for PRD, SU-1 for C1 uses
<i>Proposed Zoning</i>	New zoning: SU-2 VH Town Center, SU-2 VH Neighborhood Mixed Use, SU-2 VH Urban Campus, SU-2 VH Urban Residential, SU-2 VH Neighborhood Residential. General Design Regulations are associated to varying degrees with all properties within the Volcano Heights SDP boundary.

Staff Recommendation

Recommendation of DEFERRAL of 10EPC-40045 to the EPC Hearing October 6, 2011.

Staff Planners

Petra Morris, Planner

Mikaela Renz-Whitmore, Planner

Summary of Analysis

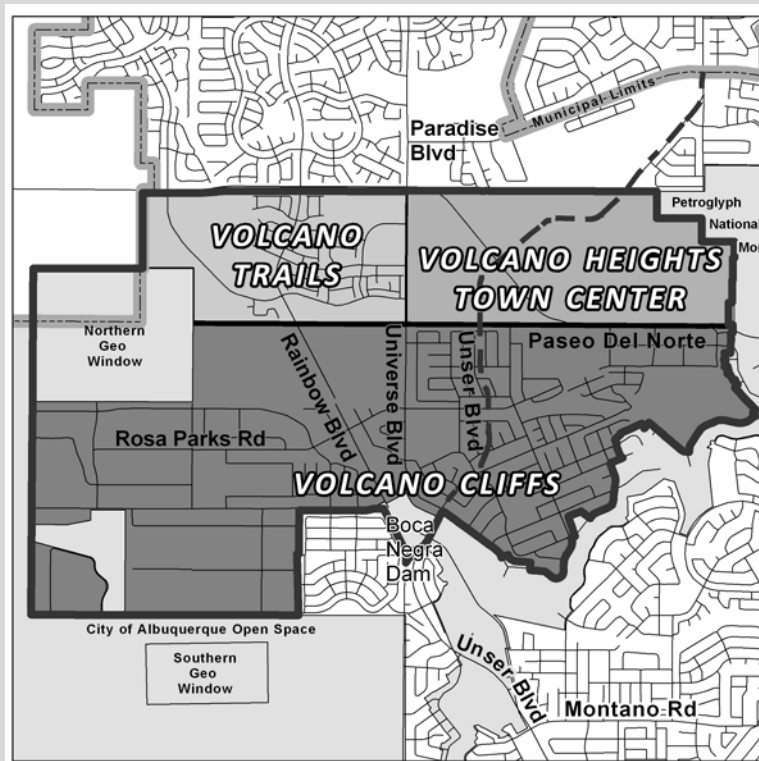
This fourth hearing for the Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan (SDP) is a continuance from February 3rd 2010.

The Volcano Heights SDP will provide regulatory guidance for the development of a large-scale, mixed-use, major activity center serving regional needs. The Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan area was designated as a Major Activity Center (MAC) in the Volcano Mesa Amendment to the West Side Strategic Plan adopted in March 2011.

Since the February 7, 2010 hearing, Planning and Council Staff has held four discussions with particular property owners, four focus group sessions, and three public meetings to discuss a new strategy for zoning and design regulations tied to a street network hierarchy in order to address several shortcomings with the July 2010 draft plan. Land-use consultant Gateway Planning Group has identified several weaknesses in the July 2010 draft plan that could be strengthened to meet market conditions and allow flexibility for development over time and across multiple land owners, while protecting the predictability of development outcomes for property owners and existing residents to the north of the plan area.

The Planning Department requests a deferral to October 6, 2011 in order to incorporate Gateway’s strategy for new zoning and design regulations based on the new Major Activity Center designation and stakeholder support.

This supplemental staff report should be read in conjunction with the September 2, 2010; November 4, 2010; and February 3, 2011 staff reports.



Surrounding Zoning, Plan Designations, and Land Uses:

	<i>Zoning</i>	<i>Comprehensive Plan Designation; Relevant Rank II & III Plans</i>	<i>Land Use</i>
<i>Site</i>	RD, SU-1 for PRD, SU-1 for C1 uses	Developing Urban, Established Urban Westside Strategic Plan Northwest Mesa Escarpment Plan	Vacant
<i>North</i>	SU-1 for C2, R2, RLT, SU-1 PRD	Established Urban, WSSP, NWMEP	Single-family, townhouse, and school site
<i>South</i>	[Volcano Cliffs SDP zones]	Established Urban, WSSP, NWMEP, Volcano Cliffs SDP	Single-family, mixed-use (new zone), urban residential (new zone)
<i>East</i>	SU-1 for PRD	Established Urban, WSSP, NWMEP	Petroglyph National Monument
<i>West</i>	RD	Developing Urban, WSSP, NWMEP, Volcano Trails	Single-family and multifamily residential and mixed-use (new zone)

New RD Zone Interpretation

Staff has received more clarification regarding existing RD zoning within Volcano Heights. RD stipulates that no more than 15% of the area with RD zoning that is covered by a sector plan can develop as Neighborhood Commercial (C-1). The City’s Zoning Enforcement Staff considers the Northwest Mesa Escarpment Plan, a Rank III plan, to meet this requirement, even though it only consists of design regulations and not zoning or land use; therefore, the range of uses for any site within the RD in Volcano Heights includes C-1 uses but not a shopping center. RD also allows unlimited R-T, R-3, and mobile home development per City Zone Code Section 14-16-2-14(A)(1). The commercial restriction of 15% includes the entire area covered by the NWMEP that is currently zoned RD and is allowed on a first-come, first-served basis. Preliminary analysis indicates that potentially more than half of Volcano Heights (approximately 300 acres) currently has the right to develop as C-1.

I. INTRODUCTION

Context

Volcano Mesa covers approximately 3,532 acres. The area is surrounded on three sides by more than 7,000 acres of open space under City, State and Federal jurisdictions, including the Petroglyph National Monument, set aside by the U.S. Congress in 1990. Volcano Mesa's cultural, natural, and built conditions have been used to inform the planning process and guide the development of policies that are sensitive and responsive to the area's unique needs, challenges, and opportunities.

The Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan (SDP) covers approximately 570 acres. The area is bordered on the north by Paseo del Norte and the Town of Alameda Grant line, on the west by Universe Boulevard, on the south by Paseo del Norte, and on the east by the Petroglyph National Monument. The Volcano Trails SDP lies on the west, and Volcano Cliffs SDP lies to the south.

Background, Planning Process, and History

In 2004, the Albuquerque City Council initiated a planning process for the Volcano Mesa, an area annexed by the City in 1981. Located along the volcanic escarpment of the city's Northwest Mesa, Volcano Mesa includes unique features and special characteristics and conditions worthy of preservation and protection.

In 2006 City Council adopted the Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan, which encompassed the Volcano Mesa area; however, the Plan was challenged and ultimately remanded to the City in 2008/9.

Early in 2010, and at the direction of City Councilor Dan Lewis and Planning Director Deborah Stover, the Planning Department, and City Council staff revisited the plan. The Planning Team separated the Volcano Mesa into three separate Sector Development Plans (SDPs) and an amendment to the West Side Strategic Plan (WSSP). Taken together, the Rank II Volcano Mesa Amendment and the three Rank III Sector Development Plans create recommendations, goals, policies, and new land-use regulations to guide the development of the Volcano Mesa community.

- The Volcano Mesa Amendment to the WSSP was adopted in March 2011 and designates the Volcano Heights Plan area as a Major Activity Center.
- Volcano Cliffs SDP was adopted by City Council on May 2, 2011.
- Volcano Trails will be heard by the City Council on August 1, 2011. (Staff intends to ask for a two-week deferral to August 15, 2011.)

At previous EPC hearings for Volcano Heights, property owners and developers expressed concerns that the Plan's regulations did not allow development that the market could support. Existing residents north of the Plan area expressed concern about the compatibility of an Urban Campus zone adjacent to their single-family, residential subdivisions.

Based on these and other substantive stakeholder comments representing a wide range of interests from prior EPC hearings, Council Services hired land-use consultant Gateway Planning Group in early 2011 to review the July 2010 draft to examine the draft zoning and regulations to determine whether:

- (1) its zoning and regulations were feasible in the market,
- (2) they would result in the kind of quality, urban environment envisioned by the Plan,
- (3) they were strong enough to provide predictability of development over time and across multiple property owners, and
- (4) they offered adequate transitions between zones and protections for existing residents to mitigate negative impacts of development.

Gateway's findings pointed to several opportunities to strengthen the Plan by pursuing a new strategy for zoning and design regulations tied to a street network hierarchy. Planning and Council Staff held several interviews, focus groups, and public meetings to explain the new strategy to property owners, existing residents, and other stakeholders and gather input about initial draft materials:

- Interviews on February 17 with several property owners.
- A work session on April 14, 2011 with several property owners.
- Four focus group sessions on May 23, 2011 open to all stakeholders.
- Three public meetings June 2, 2011 open to all stakeholders.

Next Steps

Staff plans to continue its work with Gateway, City departments, regional agencies, the National Park Service, utility providers, property owners, existing residents, and other stakeholders to draft the following components of a new framework to regulate and encourage development in Volcano Heights:

- A **street network hierarchy** that classifies mandatory roads (locations and cross sections) and criteria for non-mandatory local roads;
- A **character zone map** of desired mixed-uses and development densities, with performance-based criteria for additional height, density, and intensity in specified areas, particularly surrounding a proposed Transit Center, as well as limits on height, density, intensity, and appropriate mix of uses in transition areas adjacent to existing single-family residential areas and sensitive lands in the Petroglyph National Monument;
- **Revised zoning regulations** with design standards that tie the form of the development to the character of the adjacent street based on its classification;
- A **revised Transportation chapter** including any changes to street cross sections; and
- **Other revisions** to the July 2010 Draft Plan as appropriate.

II. REASONS FOR DEFERRAL

Major Activity Center (MAC)

The Volcano Mesa Amendment to the WSSP, adopted in March 2011, designates the Town Center in Volcano Heights as a Major Activity Center. In order to maximize the opportunities for a regional destination center for employment, retail, and entertainment, more analysis and careful consideration of design regulations, incentives for quality development and density, and coordination with a proposed Transit Center and road network will be needed.

Transportation System

Volcano Heights includes the intersection of two vital, regional roads: Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard. The limited-access nature of these roads poses a challenge in planning for high-density development that is safely accessible via multiple modes of travel, including autos, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. A local network of roads must support development and provide viable, safe access for nearby residents and regional commuters. The July 2010 Draft Plan does not yet include the detail and analysis needed to ensure that transportation will work at the regional and local level.

Staff has been working with the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) and the City's Department of Municipal Development (DMD) to gather current and future plans for Paseo and Unser and coordinate adjacent land-use planning, which may require modifications to the few access points currently on the books for Paseo and Unser within the Heights boundary and/or a coordinated local road system that provides access to development while maintaining the regional function of Paseo and Unser.

In addition to a more careful look at a proposed road network that includes both mandatory and non-mandatory roads, a traffic model will be needed to test the proposed network to assure that it supports the proposed development without a negative impact on regional and local traffic. The goal of the Plan is to create development that can support transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists and minimize the reliance on automobiles as the only form of viable transportation on the West Side. A traffic model of proposed transportation and land-use can help assure property owners, residents, transportation planners, and decision-makers that access into and surrounding Volcano Heights will enhance transportation on the West Side.

Transit

Staff has been working with MRCOG and ABQ Ride to flesh out the details of the opportunity to provide enhanced transit service for the Volcano Heights area. MRCOG is currently conducting a feasibility study for an east/west Bus-Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor connecting Paseo del Norte and the North-I-25 / Jefferson Boulevard Major Activity Center. ABQ Ride is working closely with MRCOG to explore the possibility of a transit center in Volcano Heights that could serve as a transit hub for West Side commuters.

As gas prices continue to rise and traffic continues to increase on limited river crossings, the need for a strong east/west transit connection becomes ever greater. Sustainable development on the West Side must include planning for transit corridors as well as incentives and regulations for development that supports and enhances multiple transportation options.

Trails/Bikeways

With the opportunity to take more time to consider the transportation network within and surrounding Volcano Heights, Staff hopes to work with property owners, National Park Service representatives for the Petroglyph National Monument, bike advocates, and pedestrian advocates to create incentives and explore possibilities for trails and bikeways throughout the Plan area and connecting to other trails and open space in the area.

Transitions to Existing Residential Areas

Existing residents north of the Volcano Heights Plan area expressed concern over the compatibility of their predominantly single-family detached neighborhoods and the proposed Urban Campus Zone in the July 2010 Draft Plan. Staff recognizes that a transition zone is needed to protect existing residents from the negative impacts of more intense development proposed to the south. Staff will work with existing residents and property owners to introduce Transition Zones next to existing single-family residential subdivisions in order to limit development intensities, building heights, and the mix of uses to achieve better compatibility with adjacent development.

Transitions to the Escarpment

While the July 2010 Draft included a low-intensity, residential zone adjacent to the Petroglyph National Monument, the renewed focus on a mandatory street network introduces the opportunity to consider a mandatory, single-loaded street as the buffer between development and the Monument. In addition to the protections afforded by the limits proposed for the Transition Zone described above, a single-loaded street would preserve views and public access to the National Monument as well as offer opportunities to incorporate a trail and potential historical and educational stations along the Monument edge.

The National Park Service is willing to consider a trail adjacent to or weaving in and out of the Monument boundary, and Staff intends to work with the Park Service and property owners to explore this idea and how it might connect to other trails, bikeways, and transportation corridors.

Building Heights

Existing residents and other stakeholders expressed concerns over the building heights proposed in the July 2010 Draft Plan. At the public meeting on June 2, 2011, Gateway showed a simple 3-D model that illustrated how tall buildings appear to be from various viewpoints surrounding the Heights Plan. Building heights were shown at 18 feet, 26 feet, 40 feet, and 110 feet, and participants at the meeting seemed relieved that there was very little distinguishable difference between these building heights, even at 110 feet. It seems that there may be an opportunity to consider offering additional height/density bonuses in the non-Transition zones in return for development that meets particular performance criteria and/or includes park, open space, or rock outcropping dedications; civic plazas; additional lighting and/or landscaping; transit shelters; and/or other public amenities.

At the same time, existing residents living on the border of the Plan area will lose their views and sense of “open space” even with the addition of 18 feet buildings adjacent to their homes. Current discussions for the Transition zones include matching building heights to adjacent development, i.e., 26 feet on the north and south borders of the Plan area and 18 feet on the east adjacent to the Escarpment.

The details still need to be worked out in terms of allowable heights in each zone, the stepping down of building heights as development moves toward existing residents or the Monument, and the particular incentives, bonuses, and criteria by which they would be granted.

III. CONCLUSION

The Planning Department requests an ultimate Environmental Planning Commission (EPC) recommendation to City Council to approve the Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan. The Volcano Heights SDP will provide regulatory guidance for the development of a large-scale, mixed-use, Major Activity Center serving regional needs. It will adopt flexible zoning, land use, and transportation strategies in recognition of the larger difficulties of infrastructure delivery, development phasing, and fluctuating economic conditions affecting the plan area. Its strategies will be based on implementing the goals and policies of the Volcano Mesa WSSP amendment, which identifies Volcano Heights as a major transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use Major Activity Center with a design that is responsive to its unique location and landscape.

The Planning Department requests that the EPC defer the Volcano Heights SDP hearing on July 7th, 2011 to October 6th, 2011 in order to strengthen the Plan through a new zoning strategy, gather stakeholder comments and input, and address agency and public comments and recommendations in an updated version of the Plan.

IV. FINDINGS FOR DEFERRAL – 10EPC 40045, 07 July 2011, Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan

1. These findings are written to support a staff recommendation of deferral and do not reflect the more complete findings required to support a recommendation of approval at this time.
2. The Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan covers an area of approximately 570 acres. The plan boundaries are the Petroglyph National Monument to the east, Paseo del Norte to the south, Universe to the west, and Paseo del Norte and the Alameda Town Grant line to the north.
3. Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan currently contains RD, SU-1 for PRD, SU-1 for C-1 uses.
4. This plan is one of three distinct but related sector development plans intended to guide future development in the Volcano Mesa community. The other two plans are the Volcano Cliffs Sector Development Plan, now adopted, and the Volcano Trails Sector Development Plan, to be heard before the City Council on August 1, 2011. The three plans share similar policy underpinnings that are included in a companion amendment to the Rank II, West Side Strategic Plan, which designates a Major Activity Center in Volcano Heights.
5. The Major Activity Center designation for the Town Center in Volcano Heights will need to be coordinated with strengthened design regulations and density/bonus incentives to match market conditions for pedestrian- and transit-oriented development while protecting future opportunities for additional density and development in this area. Staff will need to revisit the proposed zoning map, regulations, and design regulations and work with all stakeholders to achieve a balance between incentives for desired development and regulations that will result in predictable, high-quality development in the short- and long-term.
6. The road network in the July 2010 Draft Plan does not include enough detail or designate mandatory roads required for this area to develop over time and across multiple property owners. Staff will need to work with MRCOG, DMD, and ABQ Ride, as well as property owners and other stakeholders, to create and test a street network hierarchy of mandatory roads with criteria for non-mandatory roads that: (a) protect or enhance the regional function of Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard, (b) establish mandatory roads with required cross sections that will help coordinate predictable development along corridors and across property lines, and (c) establish safe, efficient transportation within and through Volcano Heights for automobiles, transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

7. Given current economic and population trends, achieving the vision for development in the July 2010 Draft Plan will require a viable transit system supported by transit-oriented development patterns. More detail and analysis needs to be incorporated into the Plan in terms of (a) a transit center location or multiple options for locations, (b) workable transit corridors as part of the road network, and (c) zoning and design regulations that create incentives and optimize conditions for transit-oriented development in the short- and long-term.
 8. Staff requires more time to explore the opportunity for trails and bikeways within the transportation network within and surrounding Volcano Heights. Working with property owners, National Park Service representatives for the Petroglyph National Monument, bike advocates, and pedestrian advocates, Staff intends to create incentives and explore possibilities for trails and bikeways throughout the Plan area that connect to other trails and open space in the Volcano Mesa area.
 9. The Volcano Heights Urban Campus (VHUC) Zone proposed on the northern border of the Plan area in the July 2010 Draft Plan is incompatible with adjacent, existing residential subdivisions to the north. Staff needs additional time to develop a Transition Zone to protect existing residents from the negative impacts of more intense development proposed toward the center of the Plan area by limiting development intensities, building heights, and the mix of uses in the Transition Zone to achieve better compatibility with adjacent development.
 10. Staff intends to work with the National Park Service and property owners to propose a single-loaded street as the preferred buffer between development and the Petroglyph National Monument, perhaps in coordination with a trail for non-motorized vehicles. In addition, Staff would like time to consider building height limits of 18 feet within a certain distance from the Monument, similar to the approach adopted in the Volcano Cliffs Sector Development Plan.
 11. Staff believes it would be beneficial to revisit the strategy for building heights and development density in all zones. Staff intends to work with all stakeholders to develop (a) building height limits for all zones, (b) height/density bonus criteria for development in the more intense zones, and (c) adequate transitions to step down the intensity of development and building heights toward the edges of the Plan boundary, particularly adjacent to existing single-family development and sensitive lands.
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STAFF RECOMMENDATION – 10EPC 40045, 07 July 2011.

DEFERRAL of 10EPC 40045, the Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan to October 6th, 2011, based on the preceding Findings in order to prepare Plan revisions in the form of conditions.

***Petra Morris and Mikaela Renz-Whitmore
Planners***

Attachments

Attachment 1. Public comments and correspondence from February – June 29, 2011