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El Paso Board of County Commissioners, Sept. 7 and 14 Red Rock Acres rezoning approved despite opposition

By Helen Walklett
During September, the El Paso Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approved a rezoning request for part of the proposed Red Rock Acres development off Highway 105 between Monument and Palmer Lake.

Red Rock Acres rezoning
The Red Rock Acres rezoning application came to the Sept. 14 BOCC meeting with a recommendation for approval from the Sept. 2 El Paso County Planning Commission meeting. *See the Planning Commission article on page 1.*

The request by landowner JZ's Land Development LLC was to rezone a 20.88-acre property zoned RR-5 (rural residential) on the east side of Red Rock Ranch Drive, immediately south of its intersection with Highway 105. The application was two-fold with a request to rezone the northern 5.37 acres to RR-0.5 and the remaining southern 15.51 acres to RR-2.5. The applicant also owns property directly east, which is zoned RR-0.5. The intention would be to develop both properties as the Red Rock Acres subdivision with a total of around 37 single-family homes.

John Green, planner II, Planning and Community Development Department, told the BOCC that there have been significant objections by neighbors to the rezoning, with over 100 letters of opposition received ahead of the Planning Commission meeting. At that meeting, commissioners heard concerns centered on density, traffic impacts, wildlife impacts, fire mitigation, and a wish to preserve the rural character of the neighborhood. No one spoke in favor at that meeting.

Eleven members of the public spoke in support at the BOCC meeting, many stating that the development would provide much-needed affordable housing in the area.

A neighbor spoke specifically in support of the 0.5-acre rezone, stating, "I know there have

been some concerns about bringing in small properties, half acre, but a half-acre property is hardly small compared to others in the Tri-Lakes area." He continued, "I think this option is the best we can hope for, and I'd like to thank JZ's Land Development because I know a different developer might be here in front of you today trying to get multi-family housing in there, apartments."

Jason Sanders, a Palmer Lake resident, described the rezoning as important because it would provide continuity with the bordering acres. He said, "there's multiple eyesores coming into Palmer Lake like commercial, bars, dog grooming, there's trailer parks like we've had mentioned. When you come into the valley of Palmer Lake there is a sea of homes that are on the hillside, so adding these additional homes is not going to cause any ugliness or any downside to the road."

Eleven neighbors spoke in opposition, citing incompatibility with nearby developments and with the surrounding zoning. Martha Brodzick, a nearby resident, said, "I'm not against development. I'm just wanting to have something that fits into an area of this part of El Paso County that is more rural like the rest of it."

Replying to the public comments, Jim Stilltner of JZ's Land Development said, "During the application process, my team has met El Paso County staff and I assure you that if I thought that this did not conform with the rules and guidelines, that staff right there would [have] told me and I would [have] made modifications to this. This plan does work, and it conforms, and it is really good for this area." He continued, "Many of the residents brought up terrific points we know we need to address at the preliminary and final plat to include traffic, water, sewer, utilities, fire evacuation, and many other items. I understand this."

Ahead of the vote, Commissioner Stan VanderWerf commented, "This is one of the very difficult ones that we've had to go through. We've had an enormous amount of testimony both in favor and in opposition."

Commissioner Holly Williams said, "I know that traffic is a big concern, and I suspect that we will see some improvements there at the Red Rocks and Highway 105 intersection. Acceleration, deceleration lanes as I know that that is typically what comes forward with these applica-

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