

Arizona Buildings

Solutions for Building Owners & Managers

Summer 2010

Energy-Efficient Measures Target Existing Buildings

By Darlene Casella

In the past years, five privately owned multi-tenant office buildings in Arizona – Collier Center, The Phoenix Plaza, 24th at Camelback I, Renaissance I and Renaissance II – have gone green, earning the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED-Existing Buildings Operations & Maintenance certification. These are the first of their breed in Arizona.

continued on page 4

CONTENTS

Riding the Green Express
Page 8

HVAC... Repair Or Replace?
Page 11

Legally Clean
Page 15

Energy Audits
Page 17

Leases In Bankruptcy
Page 21

Renovate Your Landscape
Page 25

Speculative Builder Tax
Page 28

Is Day Cleaning Right For Your Building?
Page 30

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Riding the Green Express

Light Rail is the Ticket to Funding Sustainable Development

By Dustin C. Jones

Five years ago, Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon courageously announced his intention to rehabilitate a dilapidated 12-mile stretch between the Arizona Capitol and Arizona State University in Tempe.

He appropriately branded the area along Washington Street the Opportunity Corridor and pledged to replace the shuttered businesses, vacant lots and dilapidated trailer parks with new office, biomedical, industrial and developments.

Unfortunately, the recession stepped in before the idea could fully take root and today the Opportunity Corridor is still packed with opportunity, but short on actual redevelopment projects.

That is, unless you take into

consideration one major development that occurred in the interim: light rail.

Construction of a light rail line through parts of Tempe, Mesa and Phoenix – including in the Opportunity Corridor – raises critical questions about its potential effect on land use and urban development. But more importantly, light rail presents an enormous (and to date un-tapped) opportunity in Arizona for public leaders to take their eyes off the sprawl ball and focus, instead, on how to build density along the track to sustain ridership.

Like the spine is to the human body, light rail is the backbone of a thriving urban scene. Density is the fuel that feeds the core. To flourish, density needs zoning code changes and

public policies that encourage a mix of commercial and residential projects.

In short: light rail begs for sustainable, transit-oriented development (TOD) that promotes walkability and increases dependence on public transportation.

Says Yonah Freemark, an Urban Leaders Fellow sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, in a Grassroutes column for Next American City magazine, “If you’re developing a transit system, you better make the neighborhoods around it adapt to using it. Otherwise, you’ll get a system with low ridership, clearing the way for the eventual dismantlement of the service and a reduction in transportation alternatives for the population.”



He's right. Light rail has the ridership. According to Valley Metro, more than 1.2 million people boarded the trains in April. Now, local government leaders need to determine how to use the rail as bait to capture billions in federal funding available for building more liveable, sustainable communities.

U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan confirmed this reality when he announced at the 18th Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) gathering in May that HUD will begin scoring federal grant applications by how well neighborhoods use transportation to help residents connect to jobs, schools and stores. Approximately \$3.25 billion is available in grant money.

Additionally, \$1.5 billion in Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants and \$100 million for regional integrated planning initiatives are up for grabs through the Obama administration's new Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities, a smart-growth partnership formed by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Maricopa Association of

Government (MAG), representing the Valley's automobile-centric transportation governing authority, already has identified a \$6.6 billion funding gap for highways in its 2011-2031 Regional Transportation Plan, based on lagging sales tax revenues.

The obvious solution would be to stop chasing freeway dollars and embrace public transportation as an economic development tool.

Phoenix took vital first steps in that direction in April 2009, when city planners met with public and private partners, including the EPA, to explore TOD and determine how best to promote it. They concluded with a list of 23 tools and incentives that could be implemented in Phoenix and Mesa to encourage transit-related density, including parking reductions in the downtown, draft station area plans and TOD overlay district design standards.

They also advocated for development of citywide and regional TOD strategic plans, concentrated education and outreach efforts and the adoption of form-based codes aimed at creating a regulatory framework to encourage the type of development appropriate for station areas.

Cultivating density along transportation routes is nothing new. The growth patterns are a throwback

to the turn of the century, when neighborhoods, homes and businesses cropped up along streetcar lines. What's new, at least for metro Phoenix, is a concerted effort to make it happen.

Though it's been considered a dirty word here for decades, density has a place in the Valley. That place is along the light rail.

Said Phoenix Community Alliance President Don Keuth, speaking last year at a meeting with Arizona State University's Stardust Center for Affordable Homes and the Family and HUD Deputy Secretary Ron Sims: "Different rules are going to come out of Washington that will make doing the 'same old' impossible, and if we don't have a plan to meet these new objectives, then we will be left behind."

Summing up, he added, "We need to instill 'spinal courage' to do something different because we have to. If we don't, this community is not going to reach its potential."

*Dustin C. Jones of Tiffany & Bosco is a Phoenix-based zoning attorney and green development champion whose knowledge of land use, development and government issues helps bridge the gap between clients' projects and municipal, state and federal officials' approval. **AB***

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