

Minor General Plan Amendment, Rezoning & Preliminary Plat Project Narrative SEC of Ironwood Drive and Superstition Boulevard Apache Junction, Arizona



On behalf of:
Bela Flor Communities, LLC

January 5, 2021

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1. Introduction

Pew & Lake, PLC, on behalf of our client, Bela Flor Communities, is pleased to submit this project narrative and related exhibits in support of a minor general plan amendment, planned development rezoning, and preliminary plat request for a proposed residential community on approximately 7.01 net acres at the SEC of Ironwood Drive and Superstition Blvd. in Apache Junction. The property may be identified as Pinal County Assessor Parcel Numbers (APNs) 101-15-031A, -030A, -029, -028A, & -032 (the "Property"). If the requests discussed in this narrative are approved, they will allow for the development of Ironwood Station, a community of 96 townhomes.

Figure 1 – Context Aerial Map



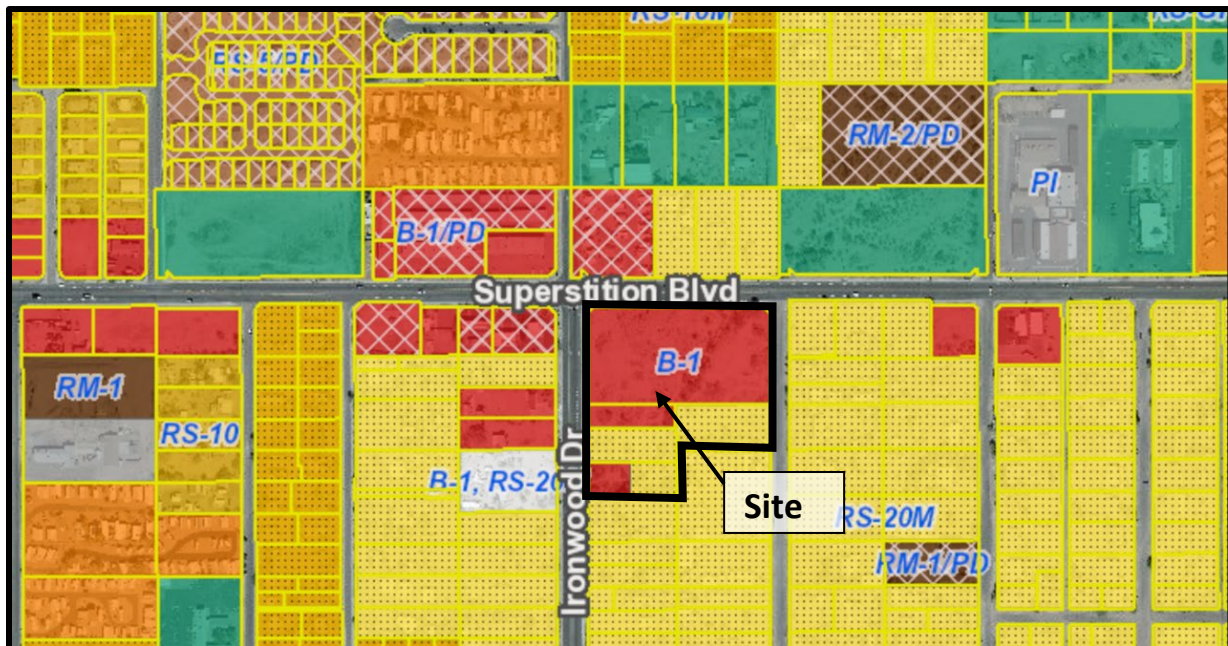
2. Existing General Plan Designation and Zoning Classification

As shown on the next page, the site currently has multiple General Plan designations including Medium Density Residential (10 units/acre) and Commercial. Also as shown on the next page, the site also maintains multiple zoning designations including Medium Density Single-Family Detached Residential (Minimum 20,000 sq. ft. lots; RS-20M) and General Commercial (B-1).

Figure 2 - Existing General Plan Map



Figure 3 - Existing Zoning Map



3. Relationship to Surrounding Properties

North of the site is Superstition Boulevard followed by a commercially zoned park model development and rural residential properties. To the east is Gold Drive and then rural residential properties. To the south there is an RV Trailer Park and a single-family residence. West of the site is Ironwood Drive followed by commercial properties which

include a gas station and small commercial buildings. The table on the next page shows the existing uses, General Plan Designations and Zoning Classifications for the site and the surrounding parcels.

Table 1 - Relationship to Surrounding Properties

	General Plan Designation	Zoning	Existing Use
North	Commercial & Medium Density Residential	B-1/PD & RS-20M	RV Park; Manufactured Homes
East	Medium Density Residential	RS-20M	Single-Family; Manufactured Homes
South	Medium Density Residential	RS-20M	RV Park; Single-Family
West	Commercial & Medium Density Residential	B-1 & RS-20M	Gas Station; Commercial; Manufactured Homes
Project Site	Commercial & Medium Density Residential	B-1 & RS-20M	Vacant

4. Requests

Our requests to the City of Apache Junction are for the following:

1. Minor General Plan Amendment from Commercial and Medium Density Residential (10 units/acre) to Higher Density Residential (40 units/acre);
2. Rezoning from B-1 & RS-20M to High Density Multiple Family Residential (RM-2) with a Planned Development Overlay (PD) to allow for the development of 96 townhomes;
3. Site Plan Approval; and
4. Preliminary Plat Approval.

The applicant will work with the City of Apache Junction Staff to develop the precise language required for notices of public hearings and the property posting to ensure that they accurately reflect the proposed change to the zoning map.

5. Project Description

This community is a well-designed, single-family attached (townhome) housing product with appropriately located open space areas to buffer to the adjacent neighbors to the south. The community is gated while still engaging the surrounding streets and providing for a unique townhome development in a growing part of Apache Junction. As noted, there will be 96 homes, which yields a total density for the site of 13.7 du/acre (net). The

proposed density is aligned with both the proposed general plan designation as well as the prevailing general plan designations already in the area. The conceptual site plan is provided below.

Figure 4 – Conceptual Site Plan



Design Intent

Each of the future homes will be two-stories and in keeping with the high-quality design standards of both the City of Apache Junction and Bela Flor Communities. Each lot maintains usable patio space with direct access to the system of pedestrian connections.

The homes feature a contemporary aesthetic and use a variety of building materials and colors to provide visual interest. Two primary variations in building color and materials are proposed to diversify the project while still utilizing complementary themes. The livable square footage of the townhomes varies from 1,583 to 1,850 sq. ft. with three floor

plan options provided. Each option maintains an open floor plan, private patio space, two-car garage, 3 bedrooms and 2.5 bathrooms.

Structured landscaping and plantings will complement the clean, modern look of the homes.

Pedestrian Circulation

Pedestrian movement within the site is accomplished through a series of interconnecting 4-foot-wide sidewalks and landscaped paseos that connect front doors first to the community, and then to the adjacent public streets and neighborhoods. Multiple pedestrian access points also lead to both Superstition Blvd. and Ironwood Dr. where the meandering sidewalk bring variety and interest to the streetscape and will complement the perimeter homes. Along Ironwood, Superstition and Gold Drive, the homes act as the primary boundary with full view fencing and pedestrian gates encouraging pedestrian movement. This approach should also lead to a very welcoming and pedestrian friendly feel for the project.

There are 30 homes with front door access directly onto either Superstition or Gold Drive, with the garages tucked behind the homes so that vehicular access is from within the site. We believe this arrangement will provide an attractive streetscape and help provide a very friendly feel to the neighborhood while minimizing the visual effect of garage doors from outside the project.

Vehicular Circulation

Primary access to the site is provided for residents and guests from Ironwood Drive, which is gated, with an on-site turn around to avoid safety issues of backing onto Ironwood Drive. The entrance is highlighted by the attractive gated entrance accentuated with the use of palm trees. An additional gated ingress point is provided for residents only from Gold Drive, which due to its much lower traffic volume does not have the same safety concerns. Egress is available at both Ironwood Drive and Gold Drive. A main spine road (26 feet fc/fc) connects Gold Drive to Ironwood Drive through the project with a series of looped streets / alleys (24 feet bc/bc) providing vehicular access to each of the homes. Of the 96 total homes, 70 homes are accessed directly from the looped street system and 26 homes obtain access through closed-end alleys.

Parking

Each of the townhome units will have a two-car garage. Therefore, there are 192 resident parking spaces proposed for this development. Additionally, there are 39 guest parking spaces, including four van accessible ADA spaces, which are strategically located throughout the community to facilitate easy access to all units. There is a total of 231 parking spaces provided for by the 96-lot development, which results in a parking ratio of 2.42 parking spaces/unit.

Because each home has more than sufficient assigned parking, and visitor parking is adequately provided throughout the project, on-street parking will not be allowed on any streets within the development. This rule will appear in the CC&Rs and be strictly enforced by the HOA. The total amount of parking provided is consistent with the Apache Junction Parking Code.

Amenities

Future homeowners in this townhome project will benefit from several community amenities which will include a premier swimming pool with jacuzzi, shade structures, lawn beach area, two bathrooms and palm trees strategically placed to maximize identification and sense of place. The amenity area also features a fire pit, tot lot, and a dog park with two ante pens. This community features 2.28 acres of open space (which is 32.6% of total site net acreage).

Solid Waste

The community has been designed to provide for solid waste disposal with individual barrel collection being provided by private service. Please see the waste collection site plan exhibit with details on barrel collection locations identified. This exhibit also includes details on adequate turning radius and backing distances.

Proposed Drainage

This site naturally drains from the northeast to the southwest. Currently, offsite storm water flows enter the site just west of Gold Drive and then exit to the neighboring properties to the south. Bela Flor proposes to channelize and pipe storm water through the site; thus, providing additional usable areas. Onsite storm water will be handled onsite but the flows may be comingled to provide optimum use of this complicate site.

Dark Sky Community

Ironwood Station intends to contribute to the goals related to establishing a Dark Sky community. For instance, fixtures will be full cutoff and fully shielded and reduced light pole heights will be provided.

Development Standards

The table below provides a summary of the site development standards including anticipated deviations to be approved under the Planned Development Overlay (PD). Deviations from the RM-2 standards are highlighted in **red**.

Table 2 - Development Standards

	RM-2 Development Standards	Proposed Development Standards
Minimum Lot Area (sf.)	1,980	1,980
Maximum Density (dwelling units per acre)	22	13.7
Minimum Lot Width (ft.)	60	22
Minimum Building Setback (Ironwood Drive) (ft.)	10	13
Minimum Building Setback (Superstition Boulevard) (ft.)	20	15
Minimum Building Setback (Gold Drive) (ft.)	20	15
Minimum Interior Front Setback (main structure) (ft.)	20	15

	RM-2 Development Standards	Proposed Development Standards
Minimum Interior Side Setback (main structure) (ft.)	10	0
Minimum Interior Street Side Setback (all structures) (ft.)	10	5
Minimum Interior Rear Setback (ft.)	20	14.5
Minimum Setback from front patio to property line (Superstition Boulevard) (ft.)	20	8.3
Minimum Setback from front patio to property line (Gold Drive) (ft.)	20	7.8
Planting Strip width along ROW (ft.)	10	8
Maximum Lot Coverage	50%	50%
Building Height (ft.)	40	40
Parking Spaces	138	231
Private Street Width (ft.)	28	26
Private Alley Width (ft.)	28	24

6. General Plan Conformance

The proposed minor general plan amendment constitutes an overall improvement to the general plan and is consistent with the overall intent of the 2020-2050 General Plan. The proposed development places a higher density townhome development on the corner of two major arterial roads in an area which is proximate to the developing core of Apache Junction.

The proposed density for the project will be capped near 13.7 du/acre via stipulations to the zoning case. The transition to Higher Density 40 du/acre under the general plan is largely a technical requirement to bring the site into conformance with the Planned Development standards of the zoning ordinance.

The proposed amendment to the general plan achieves important goals of the 2020-2050 General Plan and the General Plan Amendment Criteria as detailed below:

NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION, REVITALIZATION AND HOUSING ELEMENT GOAL 3.2

Diversify housing stock and neighborhoods by incorporating a variety of housing types and associated values to allow for a diverse demographic of residents.

The applicant is unaware of an Apache Junction townhome development which engages major arterial streets and creates a community similar to the architectural standards and site design like Ironwood Station. This high-quality development will add to the diversity of quality Apache Junction housing stock and provide a desirable value to the City.

NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION, REVITALIZATION AND HOUSING ELEMENT GOAL 3.3

Maintain and attract a quality housing stock in condition, design and construction materials.

Bela Flor Communities develops beautiful and livable communities that also meet market demands. The use of quality materials and superior building techniques will reflect the high standards of both Bela Flor and the City of Apache Junction.

LAND USE ELEMENT GOAL 11.2

Provide a balance of uses throughout the community.

This two-story, multi-family, medium density residential product provides a unique housing option not prevalent in Apache Junction at this stage in the community's growth. The developer believes that construction of this project will prove a catalyst for similar quality projects in other appropriate areas of the City.

GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT CRITERIA

Below are the *general plan amendment criteria* (in italics) with the applicant's response immediately following in standard font typeface.

1. *Whether the amendment proposes a land use designation that the land use plan map does not adequately provide optional sites to accommodate.*

The current land use map does not provide other optional sites that are of the same quality and quantity. This site, at the corner of two prominent roads, will allow the development of a high-quality housing project that is unique to Apache Junction. To achieve these type of high-quality housing projects, the proposed land use designation needs to be changed.

2. *Whether the amendment constitutes an overall improvement to the general plan, will not solely benefit a particular landowner or owners at a particular point in time, and is consistent with the overall intent of the 2020-2050 general plan.*

This amendment provides a direct benefit to the City of Apache Junction because it adds a high-quality housing project to the City and complements the available housing diversity. We further believe that this project will spur additional similar development within the City limits. The proposed change will not solely benefit this owner and is a well-balanced approach to land use planning. Please see the discussion above related to how the proposal is consistent with important goals cited in the General Plan.

3. *Whether the proposed amendment is justified by an error in the 2020-2050 general plan as originally adopted.*

The applicant is not sure whether the general plan map maintains errors for the subject parcel. However, it is obvious that the general plan land use designations at this

location were largely established by ownership at the time. Now that these properties have been assembled together, a fair adjustment to the General Plan map is warranted. Stated differently, the proposed amendment will unify these parcels under one designation and establish the appropriate designation for the site.

4. *Whether the proposed change is generally consistent with goals, objectives, and other elements of the 2020-2050 general plan.*

Please refer to the above discussion which cites the specific goals, objectives, and elements which the proposal meets. Additionally, we propose that the change is consistent with the General Plan and does not conflict with any goals of the General Plan.

5. *Whether the proposed change is justified by a change in community conditions or neighborhood characteristics since adoption of the plan.*

The subject property has remained vacant as the City of Apache Junction has developed. The demand for commercial or larger lot development at this intersection has not materialized and likely never will. Demand for this type of housing product has increased in the area. We note that the existing general plan designation for portions of the subject site are closely aligned with the proposal with the existing medium density 10 du/acre designation.

6. *Whether the amendment will adversely impact a portion of, or the entire community by:*

- a. *Significantly altering acceptable existing land use patterns, especially in established neighborhoods.*

Development of a medium density townhome product with 13.7 du/ac density is an acceptable land use in an area that maintains high density manufactured home developments and various other residential developments. Ironwood Station also serves as an appropriate transition to the major arterial streets. This land use actually has a lower traffic impact than a typical commercial / retail development.

- b. *Significantly reducing the housing to jobs balance in the planning area.*

The placement of high-quality housing in this area will increase the supply of capable workers in Apache Junction and increase the demand for other jobs and services. No significant commercial or office operations have been viable for this site and are not foreseen.

- c. *Substantially decreasing existing and future water supplies.*

The existing facilities are adequate to serve the proposed development. The City of Apache Junction engineering department and related utility companies have confirmed that the proposed development will not decrease existing or future water supplies.

d. Replacing employment with residential uses.

Portions of the site are currently zoned for general commercial uses. The site has not proven viable to develop with commercial uses and demand in this part of the City would likely not yield high-paying employment opportunities.

e. Requiring additional and more expensive improvements to infrastructure systems and/or proximity to municipal facilities and/ or services than are needed to support the prevailing land uses and which, therefore, may impact the level of service for existing and proposed developments in other areas.

As stated above, the City of Apache Junction engineering department has reviewed this request and confirmed that the existing infrastructure can handle the additions. Additional defraying of the developments impact will be accounted for with the payment of required development impact fees.

f. Increasing traffic (without mitigation measures) on existing roadways beyond the planned level of service, and that negatively impact existing and planned land uses.

Ironwood Drive and Superstition Boulevard are major arterials which are the City's primary roadways to handle traffic impacts from development such as this. The City engineer has not raised any concerns with the proposed use increasing the planned level of service on surrounding roads.

g. Affecting the existing character (i.e., visual, physical and functional) of the immediate area.

While the development will place buildings on currently vacant land, the character of the area will be improved because of the attractive housing product and thoughtful placement of landscaping and open space.

h. Increasing the exposure of residents to aviation generated noise, safety and/or flight operations.

Not applicable.

i. Materially diminishing the environmental quality of the air, water, land, or cultural resources.

A residential development of this size is not generally expected to materially diminish the environmental quality of the air, water, land or cultural resources.

j. Significantly altering recreational amenities such as open space, parks, and trails.

The land is currently privately owned and not utilized as a park or within a trail system. Therefore, it will not significantly alter any existing recreational amenities.

7. Planned Development

As discussed in the Apache Junction Zoning Ordinance, the purpose of the Planned Development Overlay District (PD) is to allow site flexibility which may not otherwise be allowed through conventional base zoning. The intent of this district is to enable development which is compatible with land uses in the vicinity and facilitate flexible building design, site design, and amenities to create a more unique and sustainable alternative to conventional development.

Ironwood Station is a high quality, unique development to Apache Junction and thus additional flexibility is needed to allow this type of development that would not otherwise be allowed through conventional base zoning. As demonstrated above, this project is compatible with the other land uses in the vicinity and the use of the PD overlay will facilitate a flexible site and building design with related amenities that will create a desirable alternative to conventional development.

Thus, the adjustments to the development's standards highlighted in Table 2, above, are justified by the overall site design, architecture and quality housing product. To conform with the general plan, a request to amend the general plan to Higher Density 40 du/ac is necessary. However, the Planned Development will cap the density and ensure an appropriate density commensurate with surrounding land uses. This project will help to set a higher standard for future development in this area and the City overall.

Ironwood Station meets the three criteria for a Planned Development set forth in the Apache Junction Zoning Ordinance, which we have detailed in italics with the Applicants responses immediately following each criteria in standard font typeface.

Criteria 1. That a better design cannot be achieved by applying the strict provisions of the underlying zoning district.

Answer 1. As detailed in this narrative and the associated plans, Ironwood Station is a high quality, unique development in Apache Junction, which provides ownership-based, multi-family, type housing. We are unaware of other similar projects of similar quality in the area. The requested changes to the bulk development standards will result in a superior design which allows a carefully crafted interaction between the buildings and the adjacent streets, whereas conventional zoning would typically have a perimeter wall which lessens the pedestrian interaction and creates less visual interest. Locating front patios closer to internal streets will accomplish a desirable townhome building design which accomplishes the overall intent of delivering a high-quality urban product to the City of Apache Junction.

Criteria 2. That strict adherence to the provisions of the zoning ordinance is not required in order to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the inhabitants of the proposed development.

Answer 2. Strict adherence to the development standards in the zoning ordinance is not required to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the inhabitants of the

proposed development. As detailed in this Narrative and the associated plans, Ironwood Station is a high-quality development that meets or exceeds the key development standards such as open space, amenities and quality design. The internal private drive aisle widths are thoughtfully coordinated with the guest parking spaces, waste management program and fire safety standards to meet the intent of the Apache Junction code while facilitating the overall project development.

Criteria 3. *That strict adherence to the ordinance is not required to ensure that property values of adjacent properties will not be reduced.*

Answer 3. The project site is bounded on three (3) sides by streets, two of which are major arterials. To the south of this site, is an older mobile home park which is being redeveloped. In fact, the owner of the southern property has provided to us a support letter, a copy of which we have provided to the City. We are of the firm opinion that this project will increase property values in the area and be a source of pride for both the future and current residents. In short, strict adherence to the development standards in the zoning ordinance is not required to ensure that property values of adjacent properties will not be reduced.

8. Public Utilities and Services

Utilities are provided as listed below. Road dedication and necessary utility infrastructure improvements are already in place. The applicant is continuing to analyze the available services and connections, but its preliminary assessment reveals there will be adequate capacity to service the proposed uses on site.

- Water: Arizona Water Company
- Sewer: Superstition Mountain Community Facilities District
- Electric: Salt River Project
- Gas: Southwest Gas
- Telecommunications: Cox Communications; CenturyLink; Mediacom
- Police: Apache Junction Police Department
- Fire: Superstition Fire and Medical District
- Schools: Superstition Mountain Elementary School; Cactus Canyon Junior High School; Apache Junction High School

9. Public Participation

The development team is committed to continuing public outreach throughout the entitlement process. We will continue to consult with Planning Staff on the most appropriate method of public outreach during the pandemic. A neighborhood meeting has been held and neighborhood outreach is summarized in the Participation Report.

10. Benefits to the City of Apache Junction

Ironwood Station will have a positive impact on the surrounding area and on Apache Junction as a whole. Some of the benefits include:

- (a) Developing a high-quality project on a vacant parcel;
- (b) Promoting economic development by bringing potential consumers in closer proximity to major arterial roads and developing commercial establishments, including to the downtown and Apache Trail commercial corridor, thereby increasing consumer spending in Apache Junction; and
- c) Generating new tax receipts and city fees for construction, ongoing lease taxes, and state-shared revenues for new residents.

11. Conclusion

If approved, the request would allow for the development of new, high quality, owner occupied, townhomes, which will be consistent and harmonious with the surrounding uses and zoning designations. We further believe that this rezoning request will spur additional new development in this area of Apache Junction and conform with the economic and planning vision for the area. The applicant and owner look forward to receiving comments and direction from City Staff.