



## **Planning and Zoning Board**

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### *Staff Report*

**CASE NUMBER:** **GPMajor 06-01**

**REQUEST:** Change Mesa 2025 General Plan land use from Medium Density Residential (4-6 du/ac), Community Commercial, Light Industrial, Mixed Use Employment and Mixed Use Residential (30% at 15+ du/ac) to Medium Density Residential (4-6 du/ac), Mixed Use Employment, Regional Commercial, Community Commercial, Business Park and Light Industrial for approximately 1699 ± acres. The proposed amendment includes realignment of the Ellsworth Road as identified in the exhibits submitted by the applicant.

**LOCATION:** Just east of the Williams Gateway Airport generally bounded by Ellsworth Road to the west, Signal Butte Road to the east, Ray Road alignment to the north and Pecos Road to the south.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Denial

**OWNERS:** Pacific Proving LLC/ Andrew Cohn

**APPLICANT:** Bues Gilbert PLLC/ Paul E. Gilbert

**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** 6

**STAFF PLANNER:** Wahid Alam, AICP  
Senior Planner, Long Range Planning

### **1) PURPOSE AND RECOMMENDATION**

- a) **State statute requirements:** According to Arizona Revised State Statutes (ARS §9-461.06), the City of Mesa is required to provide information to stakeholder agencies and solicit their comments for sixty days on General Plan Major Amendments. The key procedural elements that apply to a major amendment proposal are: there will be only one City Council public hearing designated each calendar year to consider all major amendments; such proposals need to be submitted within the same year they are heard; and a 2/3 majority vote of the City Council is need to approve them. In addition, such proposals will require two Planning and Zoning public hearings at different locations before they reach the Council hearing.
- b) **Recommendation:** Staff recommends this Major General Plan Amendment not be approved as proposed. Staff believes the best option is to deny this request to allow for re-design in conjunction with the property owner to the north. However, a continuance to next year’s review cycle is also an option.

**2) DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL**

- a) **Summary of changes in land use designations:** The current Mesa 2025 General Plan designates the amendment area (Pacific Proving property) as Light Industrial, Mixed Use Employment, Mixed Use Residential, Community Commercial and Medium Density Residential 4-6 dwelling units per acre. The following table depicts the existing land use allocation:

<b>Existing Land Use Allocation</b>				
Land Use Designation	Acreage	Percent of total	Minimum Residential Units	Maximum Residential Units
Medium Density Residential 4-6 du/ac	222	13%	888 @4 du/acre	1,332 @6 du/acre
Mixed Use Residential MUR (30% at 15+du/ac)	112	6%	0	840 @ 25 du/acre
Mixed Use Employment	305	18%	0	0
Community Commercial	28	2%	0	0
Light Industrial	1,032	61%	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,699</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>888</b>	<b>2,172</b>

The amendment application proposes to change the land use designations to Mixed Use Employment, Medium Density Residential 4-6 dwelling units per acre, Community Commercial, Regional Commercial and Business Park. The following table depicts the proposed land use allocation:

<b>Proposed Land Use Allocations</b>				
Land Use Designation	Acreage	Percent of Total	Minimum Residential Units	Maximum Residential Units
Medium Density Residential 4-6 du/ac	511	30%	2,044	3,066
Mixed Use Employment	386	23%	0	0
Regional Commercial	83	5%	0	0
Community Commercial	98	6%	0	0
Business Park	568	33%	0	0
Light Industrial	53	3%	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,699</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2,044</b>	<b>3,066</b>

The following table provides a comparison between the current general plan and proposed

amendment land use allocation:

Land Use Designation	Mesa 2025 General Plan	Proposed Amendment
Medium Density Residential 4-6 du/ac	222 acres	511 acres
Mixed Use Employment	305 acres	386 acres
Mixed Use Residential MUR (30% at 15+du/ac)	112 acres	0
Regional Commercial	0	83 acres
Community Commercial	28 acres	98 acres
Business Park	0	568 acres
Light Industrial	1,032 acres	53 acres
Total	1,699 acres	1,699 acres

\* The current and proposed land use allocation do not account for the transportation corridors, for example right-of-way for freeways and arterials.

- b) **Summary of proposed street network:** In addition to the proposed amendment to the land use designations, it is also proposed that Ellsworth Road be realigned within the Pacific Proving property. The realignment proposes that Ellsworth Road be moved approximately ¼ mile to the east of the section line within the Pacific Proving property. Ellsworth Road would then return to the section line alignment just to the south of the Pecos Road alignment. The alignment as proposed with this General Plan Amendment application, however, represents a general configuration for the road and it is anticipated that the specific details of the alignment will be worked out during the development process. The proposal also includes Williams Field Road being realigned approximately quarter of a mile south of the current alignment. However the amendment only shows the street network system within the Pacific Proving property and fails to show the linkages with the surrounding street system.
- c) **Summary of project narrative:** Besides land use changes and street realignment, the project narrative also includes a vision for two centers. One of them is described as Gateway City Center urban core and will be located south of the proposed Williams Gateway freeway. This center will be developed around the future intersection of the realigned Ellsworth and Williams Field Roads. The project narrative describes the Gateway City Center with a long-term vision of high-density corporate head quarters, high density residential as well as retail and hotel uses. The project imagines the four corners of this intersection to be developed by mid-rise office uses with parking structures and plazas for pedestrians connecting to dining and shopping. The narrative goes further to describe that the Gateway City Center could also be a desirable location for government functions and institutional headquarters as well as centers of commerce. A strong urban residential component is important to the long-term success and vitality of the Gateway City Center. These high-density residential land uses, however, will

require future Minor General Plan amendments within the Mixed –Use Employment use area.

Another center described as gateway village “suburban core” will be located north of the proposed Williams Gateway Freeway around the intersection of Williams Gateway Road and Crismon Road. The project envisions a regional shopping center including an entertainment lifestyle center at this location. This suburban center will be surrounded by medium density residential and eventually some high density residential that will require future minor general plan amendments.

The narrative also describes that a total of 11,100 to 16,400 jobs will be created by the amendment including 1,600 to 5,400 housing units.

- d) **Late submittal:** Final submittal of any revisions or supplemental information was due on September 25, 2006. Schedule of dates for 2006 General Plan Major Amendment applications are published and posted on the internet. Step 9 (action by applicant) clearly states about Monday, September 25, 2006 as the deadline for submittal of revisions (any allowed minor changes in response to issues brought out through the citizen input process as identified in the General Plan major amendment process guide). However the applicant chose to submit the final revisions to the Planning Division on October 4, 2006.

### 3) **REVIEW CRITERIA WITH COMMENTS ON HOW PROPOSAL RELATES**

- a) Mesa 2025 General Plan, Section 14.2.3, describes the criteria the Council has to use in considering Major Plan amendments. The criteria and staff analysis on them are:
  - i) The Major Amendment constitutes an overall improvement to the General Plan.
    - (1) The summary of the proposal narrative indicates a total job number of 11,100 to 16,400. These numbers are higher than would normally be projected, but would be consistent with the urban type development proposed. The amendment narrative makes reference to the Bank of America building in Fiesta District at the corner of Southern and Alma School as an example of the type of development envisioned. This development has a 16-story office tower with 1200 employees on 6 acres of land, which converts to 200 jobs per acre. The jobs per acres ratio should not be applied broadly on hundreds of acres of undeveloped land. However the potential job counts we anticipate based on the Mesa 2025 General Plan analysis is only 13,208 and the current land use categories anticipate 13,377 jobs. (Note: The late submittal includes employment potential up to 28,000 jobs and land use categories not provided for in the Mesa 2025 General Plan Land Use Map. Staff has not been able to evaluate these numbers)

- (2) The amendment promises to be mixed-use development around the “Urban Core” only. The rest of the proposal does not include land use categories that include mixed uses.
- (3) The concept of an urban core or city center is supported by the current general plan vision. However its location and composition of land uses does not seem realistic. The narrative states the need for high density residential to support such a core. Staff agrees that a high density residential will have to be included in an urban core to make it successful. It anticipates future minor amendments will be required to increase the residential units beyond the 2000 to 3000 units already included with this amendment.
- (4) While the project narrative contains some interesting and exciting statements as to the number of jobs that will be created in this area and the quality of development that will be constructed, the application is not accompanied by an annexation request and rezoning with a Development Master Plan. In the absence of these additional applications, all we will be approving is the land use patterns shown on their application. The actual development could be far different that what is being described.
- (5) Significant portion of the amendment, 1,032 acres to be exact, near the airport is currently designated as light industrial in Mesa 2025, whose users will likely be less noise sensitive compared to the type of uses one would typically find a business park as proposed for the Pacific Proving property. Noise impact in this area is expected to increase in the future.
- (6) The “Urban Core” as proposed near the airport will need large number of high density residential dwelling units for its sustainability as recognized by the project narrative. The cities of Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa are facing this challenge everyday in their downtown areas. Allowing unspecified numbers of residential housing units clustered around the urban core, which is so near the airport does not support the goals of expanding the importance of the airport. Additional residential developments near the airport will have significant impact on Williams Gateway Airport growth and its operation. Around the nation there are various examples of residential encroachments that ultimately contributed towards airport closing.
- (7) Traditionally, successful urban cores have a strong connection to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The proposal has placed the “Urban Core” in such a location in relation to the proposed Williams Gateway Freeway alignment that it is separated from the bulk of residential development on the north in GM Proving Ground property.

- (8) The proposed amendment reserves most of the land along north side of the freeway for future residential development. The best use for land along freeways is for non-residential uses as they will be less sensitive to noise compared to residential. Residential uses along freeway will require a sound mitigation wall, which will impact views and quality of life for those residents and visitors alike. Maintaining the employment uses as currently planned will make better use of the freeway frontage.
  - (9) The proposed urban core is to be centered on the major intersection of Ellsworth and Williams Field Roads. This intersection will be of a similar magnitude of Southern and Alma School Roads intersection. The projected traffic volumes and road width will not be conducive to the proposed urban core, pedestrian environment. The type of urban core proposed in the amendment should be next to, not centered around such a high traffic volume intersection, as Ellsworth & Williams Field will be.
  - (10) The project narrative states, “recent approval of Williams Gateway Freeway alignment is the single most important factor influencing the need for the Major General Plan Amendment ...”. But the existing Mesa 2025 General Plan works well with the freeway providing for employment uses along most of the length; the proposed amendment is not an overall improvement to the General Plan.
- ii) The Major Amendment is consistent with the intent of the General Plan and other adopted plans, policies and ordinances.
- (1) Jobs/housing balance – The proposed amendment anticipates more jobs than the in the current plan. The Mesa 2025 General Plan, “Land Use Plan Build out Analysis” presents an assessment of the population and employment for the City of Mesa, assuming the entire community is developed in accordance with the Land Use Plan. At build out, the City of Mesa could accommodate approximately 633,700 residents and would contain approximately 371,100 jobs, a job per capita ratio of 0.58 compared to 0.34 in 2002. A significant key to achieving this is to ensure this area far exceeds the average jobs to housing ratio. The goal of job/housing balance will be more difficult to achieve if the plan is amended as proposed. Even the job number of 16,000 employee will be offset by a significant increase in housing units clustered around the urban core.
  - (2) The existing Mesa 2025 General Plan contains the following Land use goals, objectives, and policies.  
Goal LU-5 states Provide for an adequate long-term supply of business park/industrial land that continues to enhance the City and regional employment base.

*Objective LU-5.2* Maximize the regional economic benefits of Falcon Field and Williams Gateway Airports and the surrounding areas.

Policy LU-5.2a Protect the long-term employment potential for lands surrounding Falcon Field and Williams Gateway Airports by designating appropriate areas for business, industrial, residential, commercial, and office uses.

Policy LU-5.2b Promote the benefits of airport proximity to potential office/business park developments in collaboration with private-sector developers.

Policy LU-5.2c Discourage the encroachment of residential uses around the two airports that would impact their long-term economic, employment, and operational viability.

The proposed amendment envisions a future of high density housing at Ellsworth and Williams Field Road bringing housing this close to the airport is not consistent with these statements.

(3) Southeast Valley-Pinal County Study Area Report

City Council asked for the assistance of the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) in analyzing the future economic development potential of the Williams Gateway Area. The MAG study concludes:

- (a) By 2035, the Williams Gateway Area has the potential to become the fourth largest job center in Maricopa County with over 100,000 jobs available
- (b) The Williams Gateway Area has a competitive advantages in eleven “target job clusters” where rapid growth is expected in the next two decades
- (c) Between 2010 and 2020, the Williams Gateway Area could be one of the fastest growing employment centers in Maricopa County
- (d) That in order to provide adequate space for the future employment opportunities that could be attracted to the Williams Gateway Area, a total of almost 10,000 acres of land may be needed

This proposed major amendment to change the land use with significant loss of light industrial and substantial increase of residential land uses with a potential increase of 2000-3000 housing units over the current general plan. This could severely negate the Williams Gateway Airport Area’s potential to become the fourth largest job center in Maricopa County with over 100,000 jobs available by 2035. Residential encroachment of such significant size will alter the employment scenario and jeopardize the economic viability and perhaps the sustainability of the Williams Gateway Airport Area as the Southeast Valley’s regional employment center.

High-tech and Bio-tech jobs: MAG’s market analysis outlines several key “target clusters” in which Williams Gateway Regional Job Center will have a regional

and national competitive advantage in the future. MAG study shows the rate that Maricopa County and Williams Gateway Area are projected to grow in each of the clusters by 2035. A score of 100 percent is a perfect match between the job center and the target cluster. High Tech Electronics (85%), Software (80%), Aerospace and Aviation (90%) and Bio industry (90%) are a few of the Growth Cluster.

Even though the amendment is predicting more jobs than the current plan anticipated, the amendment is also adding more housing units.

(4) Mesa 2025 Transportation Plan

- (a) The proposed amendment as submitted lacks integration with the surrounding area in terms of land uses, freeway location and circulation pattern. This proposed site (1700 acres) is only a portion of the original GM Proving ground (5000 acres). The Williams Gateway Airport, GM Proving Ground and the proposed amendment site need to be integrated by a comprehensive long-term planning process that can address all issues related to circulation, flight path, and airport terminal circulation including local and regional traffic.
- (b) The narrative of the proposed amendment talks about an urban core and its location, south of the proposed Williams Gateway Freeway at the proposed intersection of Ellsworth Road and Williams Field Road. The concept of urban core may be appropriate for the area, however its location on the south side of the proposed freeway seems inappropriate. More suitable location should be on the north side of the freeway completely integrated with the rest of the GM Proving Ground site with easy access to the future residential developments in the area.
- (c) Williams Field Road will carry a large volume of traffic from the freeway to the Airport. Given the cargo nature of this airport there will likely be a significant amount of truck traffic. The proposed urban core would impede this truck traffic and could, therefore, negatively affect the development of the airport.
- (d) The City of Mesa is preparing to engage in an update of the Mesa Transportation Plan. This update should begin in the next few months and will include an associated update to the land use plan. The plan will further refine the street pattern and land use for this area.

iii) The Major Amendment will not adversely impact the community as a whole or a portion of the community by:

(1) Significantly altering existing land use patterns:

- (a) The proposed amendment changes the land use pattern to remove employment uses next to the freeway and replaces them with residential.

- (b) The proposal is predicted on future amendments to add residential.
- (c) Places office park type uses close to noise areas rather than industrial.
- (d) Potentially adds too much retail commercial to be viable.
- (2) Causing significantly increased traffic on the existing roadway network:
  - (a) The current Mesa 2025 Transportation Plan was developed for lower intensity land use pattern. The proposed high intensity pattern proposed will have an impact on the planned road system and may overload it. The area between the freeway and airport has been envisioned for industrial/trucking uses that may not mix well with commercial and residential traffic.
- (3) Degrading the health and safety of the residents
  - (a) There are no existing residents to be affected.
  - (b) Future residents will be negatively affected by aircraft noise, would be better if urban center is north of the freeway.
  - (c) Centers urban core around very major intersection – will carry traffic similar to Southern and Alma School and will not be pedestrian friendly.
- iv) A property owner of one parcel may not subdivide or split property into smaller areas in order to avoid the major amendment requirements.
  - (1) Not an issue with this amendment request.

In reviewing the materials submitted by the applicant in light of the issues described in this report staff does not believe the applicant has met the test set forth in Mesa 2025 General Plan Section 14.2, Amendments to the General Plan, Section 14.2.2 as:

*It shall be the burden of the applicant for the amendment to prove that the change constitutes an improvement to the General Plan.*

#### **4) OTHER COMMENTS**

- a) Timing – proposal would be better if it waited on:  
At this time, the proposed major general plan amendment seems premature for the area that is going through significant changes in terms of transportation and land use planning.
  - i) Transportation plan update: The City of Mesa is proposing to proceed with the Southeast Mesa Transportation and Land Use Plan later this year. The plan will further refine the street pattern and land use for this area.
  - ii) Join with rest of GM property: The GM proving ground to the north of this amendment area is approximately 3,200 acres currently on the market for sale. Access to the Gateway Freeway, development of arterial streets to link both the parcels, coordination of utility systems, development of a coordinated land use plan which will integrate both parcels with a common development theme should be considered all at one time.
  - iii) Sub-area plan: The Williams Gateway area is one of seven sub-areas of the City that

- have particular features or land use issues have been defined for consideration in the land use plan. The city would be better served by completing this sub-area plan before considering any major plan amendments.
- b) Sixty-Day Review period: We have received written comments (copy of letters received are attached with this report) from fourteen addresses of which two support and seven do not support the amendment with the rest of them sharing information with no clear decision towards supporting or not supporting. Art Sanders, Mayor of the Town of Queen Creek in a letter identified various concern and cannot support the proposed amendment. Loss of jobs for the southeast valley, additional residential units near the airport, realignment of Ellsworth Road and introducing large concentration of commercial land uses in close proximity to the Town are among the concerns the letter mentioned. Also Boeing expressed various concerns for the amendment. To protect current and future operations at the airport, The Boeing Company urges the Mesa Planning and Zoning Board and the Mesa City Council to keep the current land uses for this property as designated in the Mesa 2025 General Plan. Lynn Kusy, Executive Director for Williams Gateway Airport in a letter expressed various concerns and asked the Board not to approve the amendment. Among other things, he mentioned that the entire Pacific Proving property is within Aircraft Over flight areas. No part of the property is exempt from over flights. He also mentioned that the proper mix of land uses, development density, and transportation improvements on the subject property can enhance the entire region, providing hotels, office, retail, commercial, and other support facilities for the Campus and the Airport south and west of the freeway, and higher density residential uses north and east of the freeway. In a similar letter Mesa Chamber of Commerce urged to leave the current land use designations since voters approved them. We also received a letter of support from Jade Grading Company asking the City of Mesa to approve the plan.
- c) Public Meeting/ Citizen Participation Report:  
Three (3) Neighborhood Meetings were held for this amendment on the following dates:
- Meeting #1 Wednesday, March 29, 2006 at 6:30 PM at 5835 S. Sossaman Road, Mesa AZ 85212
  - Meeting #2 Monday, April 3, 2006 at 6:30 PM at 5835 S. Sossaman Road, Mesa AZ 85212
  - Meeting #3 Wednesday, May 3, 2006 at 6:30 P.M at 2430 S.Ellsworth Road, Mesa AZ 85212

Letters were mailed to property owners within 300 feet of the proposed amendment, as well as registered neighborhood association groups located south of Guadalupe Road, north of Germann Road, east of Power Road, and west of Meridian Road. The applicant has submitted a detailed citizen participation plan and report for the file.

The Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Board held the special public input meeting on

Thursday, August 24, 2006 at the Williams Gateway Airport Authority, Administration Building (Board Room) at 5835 S. Sossaman Road, Mesa AZ 85212 at 6:00 p.m., as required by State statutes. No action was taken at this meeting. (see attached minutes)

- d) The Urban Land Institute (ULI) Study Panel in their presentation on September 22, 2006 shared recommendations for the study area bounded by Guadalupe Road on the north, Meridian Drive/County line on the east, Queen Creek Road on the south and Higley Road on the west. Summary of the market study for the Williams Gateway primary trade area, an area within a 10-mile radius of the airport:

- Over a 25-year planning horizon there will be a need in the study area for 1,575 acres of industrial land, 400 acres of office space and 500 acres of retail space.
- Additionally 5,250 hotel rooms at 34 sites on 105 acres and 7 golf courses on 1400 acres should be included in the plans.
- Higher educational facility demands are twice what now is planned for 320 acres and two hospital sites with 175 beds each are needed along with other medical facilities.
- The study area build out would have 165,000 residents, nearly 70,000 students at institutions of higher education and jobs for 94,000 people.

Recommendations on development strategies included Land Use:

- Planning: Long-Range, Comprehensive Master Planning
- Zoning: Overlay Zones, General Planning parameters, Land use criteria, Urban design standards

Recommendations on Regulatory Tools:

- Enhance the Airport Over flight Area II to prohibit single family and improve attenuation for multi-family

Sustainability-Superstition Vistas

The written report will not be available before early 2007.

- i) Called for urban center on east side of airport
  - ii) Mixed use along freeway with emphasis on employment, not typical suburban style development
  - iii) Need to have cooperative planning for the entire area for both land use and transportation
- e) Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB)
- i) On October 3, 2006 the Board recommend approval of the amendment as presented.
  - ii) The EDAB did not have any staff report prior to their meeting. Staff had the opportunity to provide only overview, whereas the applicant presented new exhibits and data to the Board.

**5) SUMMARY**

- a) There are some interesting ideas being prepared and presented with regards to establishing an urban center
- b) Need to keep more industrial uses, with airport support uses of hotels, etc. south of freeway
- c) Need to have the urban core north and east of the freeway integrated into the large residential area.
- d) Do not need low density residential along freeway
- e) Do not need any residential south of the freeway
- f) Need to be careful to not use up too much retail outside the urban core or it will not have the synergy needed to be successful

Attachments

- 1) Land Use Map of proposed amendment and Mesa 2025 General Plan
- 2) Project Narrative-revised (August 16, 2006)
- 3) Land Use Allocation Comparison Table- revised (August 16, 2006)
- 4) Copy of the letters received during sixty-day review period
- 5) Copies of relevant news article published in the Arizona Republic
- 6) Minutes of the P&Z Special meeting on August 24, 2006
- 7) Final revised submittal (October 4, 2006)
- 8) Additional materials