ZONING INTERPRETATION RECORD

Subject of Interpretation:
Required Landscaping for a Communications Facility

Zoning Ordinance Section Number:
11-35-5(H)

Title of Section:
Location, Design, and Operations Requirements: Required Landscaping

Cause for Interpretation:
The applicant wanted to know what are the landscaping requirements for a proposed communications facility for a telecommunications company

Interpretation:
In reviewing the site plan submitted for the project, it should also be noted that the location of the applicant’s proposed wireless communication facility (WCF) will require a slight modification of the site plan that had been approved previously for the overall development of the entire land parcel through the SPR process (case Z07-110). As submitted, the ground area of the proposed WCF extends from approximately the south boundary of the required landscape area abutting the north property line of this site, south to an area that the approved SPR site plan shows as providing parking spaces to support a commercial shell building. Because of the conflict between the two uses (the WCF ground space and the parking spaces for the commercial building cannot occupy the same location), the SPR site plan requires a minor revision, which is a process that is accomplished through an administrative review procedure.

In addition, the administrative review procedure by which the review of the applicant’s proposal was completed by Planning Division staff is the same process that leads to the issuance of a Zoning Clearance. A Zoning Clearance and Administrative Review are then, for all intents and purposes, synonymous processes. In both circumstances, an application is received, reviewed by Planning Division staff, and a letter indicating how the proposal was reviewed, considered and decided is sent to the applicant, notifying them of the decision, often with conditions of approval attached.

It should be made clear that the ability to condition approval of stealth WCF to include secondary tree and landscape plantings is authorized by the Mesa Zoning Ordinance, Section 11-35-5.H, which states:

“As determined by the context of the site and design preference proposed, additional landscaping, such secondary plantings of trees similar in appearance to the stealth design of the telecommunications facility, may be conditioned as part..."
of the approval to mitigate the visual impact of the facility.

Installing secondary plantings of similar appearance is a practice intended to provide a more typical or common appearance to a stealth designed WCF, especially for stealth facilities designed to resemble palm trees. Landscape designs in Mesa (south of the Desert Uplands area) often include several palm trees in order to meet landscaping requirements for tree counts, and provide a type of tree that does not limit visibility into a commercial center. Even in natural settings, palm trees often are found in groups, and it is rare to find a solitary natural palm tree. While very few would agree that a stealth design actually resembles a natural plant in appearance, the intent of the secondary plantings is to deflect attention away from WCF installations.

There are no installed water lines or other source of irrigation available on this site, and installation of irrigation lines is needed for the secondary palms that are to be planted to live. The alternative would be provision of regularly scheduled hand watering trucks to haul water to this location for irrigation purposes, something that cannot always be guaranteed to occur. Further, if water lines would be installed, the location of the WCF relative to the overall site would require the water lines to be extended some 300-plus feet from the south, street-side property line.