



STAFF REPORT
1/22/2020

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members
FROM: Luis Lopez, Development Services Director
SUBJECT: Coachella Travel Centre Project

- a. Environmental Assessment (EA 18-05) adopting a Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring Program for the development of the Coachella Travel Centre project.
- b. Ordinance No. 1148 approving Change of Zone (CZ 18-11) from A-R (Agricultural Reserve) to C-G (General Commercial).
- c. Conditional Use Permits (CUP 310 and 311) for drive-thru restaurant, car wash and truck wash facilities.
- d. Variance (VAR 18-09) to allow a four-story hotel building in excess of 50 feet in height, in the C-G (General Commercial) zone.
- e. Architectural Review (AR 18-09) to allow a new 3,800 sq. ft. convenience store with service station, 1,200 sq. ft. drive-thru restaurant, 5,555 sq. ft. restaurant, 2,677 sq. ft. car wash tunnel, 4,754 sq. ft. truck washing facility, and 11, 259 sq. ft. 4-story hotel with related infrastructure on 14.1 acres of vacant land located on the south side of Avenue 50 between the Whitewater Channel and the State Route 86 Expressway.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Based on new information presented herein, and any new information that may be received during the public hearing, staff is recommending that the City Council continue this item for a minimum of 60-90 days to allow a Traffic Impact Analysis to be prepared by a Traffic Engineer (including an analysis of tractor trailer / emergency response vehicle circulation, and circulation limitations caused by weight restriction limits posted at the existing Dillon Road Bridge) and engineering analysis of public water and sewer improvements necessary for the project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This item was continued from the December 11, 2019 public hearing, at which time the City Council raised traffic concerns with the project, as a result of the following issues:

- 1) Inadequacy of the traffic analysis discussed in the CEQA Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration document in light of existing substandard conditions at the intersection of Avenue 50 and Tyler Street, near the project entry and the need for a traffic impact analysis to be prepared by a licensed traffic engineer.
- 2) Seasonal flooding issues that result in closure of Avenue 50 at the Whitewater Channel immediately adjacent to the main entrance into the property and the proposed project. (Note: In addition to seasonal flooding at the Whitewater Channel, the City's draft stormwater master plan identifies seasonal flooding at Avenue 50 and Kenmore Street and Frederick Street which are located west of Cesar Chavez Street).
- 3) The State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) performed a load rating analysis on the Dillon Road Bridge at the Whitewater Channel. The Bridge Inspection Report required posting weight restriction limits signs for truckers to use alternate routes. Meanwhile, the Dillon Road Bridge has been posted with said safety concerns and a public hearing will be scheduled shortly. The City is working with Caltrans and the Dillon Road Joint Powers Authority (JPA) in applying for funding for a bridge replacement project. The process to obtain funding, design, and construction for bridge replacement is a lengthy process. Due to the structure integrity being in poor condition, the potential for a future closure of Dillon Road between the 86 Expressway and Avenue 48 may be necessary.

In addition to the above items, the City Engineer has recommended that because public sewer and water improvements for the project will require extensive off-site improvements, preparation and review of conceptual-level engineering plans and analyses be submitted for review prior to final decision actions for the project.

UPDATE:

Staff has had an opportunity to meet and confer with CEQA consultant Kaitlyn Dodson, who will be available at the public hearing to answer questions regarding the transportation/circulation analysis prepared in the Initial Study/ Mitigated Negative Declaration. Additionally, staff has had further discussions with the City Engineer regarding existing traffic congestion issues at the intersection of Avenue 50, Tyler Street, and the 86 Expressway, and necessary public sewer and water improvements, and staff has an update with additional recommendations discussed below. The Fire Department has further stated that until the traffic study is completed, they cannot make a finding of compliance with the California Fire Codes for the project.

CEQA Consultant's review of Transportation/Circulation and related issues in CEQA Document:

The City Council inquired about how the traffic analysis that feeds the CEQA Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared, and inquired about why a traffic impact analysis was not prepared. The City's CEQA consultant prepared a desk-top analysis using a trip generation manual, compared traffic impacts to assumed traffic impacts based on the City's General Plan, and considered level-of-service analysis based on a buildout scenario.

The decision to not prepare a traffic study was based on discussions in December 2018 between City staff, the applicant, and Todd Dodson Associates staff. It was agreed to utilize the data in the City's recently-adopted City General Plan which contained a comprehensive traffic study to support build out of the City. Based upon the estimated trip generation (estimated to be 3,040 trips per day, utilizing data gathered from similar projects to reach this number) and the capacity of the affected roadways as the City is built-out, it was agreed that an evaluation using the General Plan Circulation Element and Traffic Study would be adequate. As events transpired, this may not have been the best decision. The traffic data clearly demonstrates that there will be no significant circulation impacts with the City requiring additional specific data and design input/requirements from the Applicant to address adjacent roadway improvements. However, this is premised upon the Mobility Element's street sections for ultimate right-of-way dedications to widen the adjoining streets. This would require widening Avenue 50 into a 4-lane "Primary Arterial" with center median/turn lane, and making Tyler Street a 4-lane "Collector" with turn lane.

The City Council raised the issue about whether consideration should be given to seasonal flooding that occurs on the Whitewater Channel causing Avenue 50 to be closed, and leaving a single point of access road from the 86 Expressway for ingress and egress into the project. Additionally, the recent Cal-Trans safety report showing a very poor structural rating for the Dillon Road bridge is of concern because this may cause a future road closure for traffic along Dillon Road, and traffic may divert traffic towards Avenue 50 in order to get onto the 86 Expressway near the project site. In order to address these questions the CEQA Consultant would need a substantial amount of time to acquire the data necessary to respond. As such, there will not be an informed response to address these items beyond creating specific conditions of approval that would apply to the project's fair share contribution to improving the Dillon Road bridge and improving the roadways such that roadway flooding is minimized at Avenue 50. Another way to address the flooding may be to mandate a specific alternative route to the site if possible (although this may be impossible given the Project's location).

City Engineer's review of need for Traffic Impact Analysis, Traffic Circulation, and conceptual level public sewer and water plans and analyses:

The Engineering Department crafted its original recommended conditions of approval based on an understanding that Avenue 50 would connect to the 86 Expressway via a future interchange. As such, the conditions were modified or stricken at the Planning Commission meeting (condition #39 was modified and condition #48 was stricken because they do not work with the concept of considering this development without the proposed interchange/bridge).

Because the General Plan assumes a direct connection between Avenue 50 and CA 86 Expressway (not through Tyler Street as it currently exists), there are existing traffic congestion issues that have not been adequately analyzed, if a highway interchange and grade separation were to not be constructed. The north-south leg of Tyler Street would need to be improved to the same standard as Avenue 50 with a fully-improved intersection between that leg and Avenue 50. The turning movements into and out of the project site do not work under the current L-Shaped connection at Avenue 50 and Tyler Street which has no traffic signal or stop signs.

This knuckle intersection is located immediately adjacent to the sloping East Bank of the Whitewater Channel which further complicates the ability to widen these streets to their ultimate right-of-way.

The General Plan's Mobility Element requires Avenue 50 (between Grapefruit Boulevard and 86 Expressway) to be improved with 4 lanes and turning lane/center median (Primary Arterial with Bicycle Facility). And the General Plan EIR recommended "a 6-lane roadway for Avenue 50 to improve Level of Service from E to C" for this segment of the roadway. Thus, at a minimum, an additional condition of approval could be required to widen Avenue 50 to 4 lanes along the project's frontage and for a section west of the project site to improve existing traffic conditions and improve the roadway segment's level of service. A four-lane right-of-way would require a 90-foot street right-of-way dedication and improvement along the project's frontage and additional roadway widening along the Whitewater Channel to improve existing conditions. However, the project can only be required to make improvements as part of a "fair share" traffic analysis to set contributions based on the project's actual impacts. Thus, the City Engineer recommends that a traffic impact analysis with detailed traffic circulation mitigation measures be prepared for the project. A minimum of 12-foot lanes are recommended for these roadway sections.

Because off-site public sewer and water improvements will be required for the project, preparation and review of conceptual-level engineering plans and analyses are necessary. The location of off-site water and sewer infrastructure was discussed during the Pre-Application Review meetings with the developer. However, there was no utility engineering analysis prepared showing proper connections to existing water and sewer lines, on the submitted plans. The CEQA Mitigated Negative Declaration further does not discuss these aspects of the project impacts, which should be a part of the record under the project's construction impacts.

Fire Department's Review of Existing Traffic Conditions:

As a result of the City Council's expressed concerns with traffic circulation issues at the subject site the Division Chief, in consultation with the Fire Marshal's Office, have recommended that further information is needed to determine the appropriate applications of the California Fire Code in the form of a Traffic Study. This additional information is needed to ensure that the off-site circulation can support the proposed development and adequately address the need for emergency response equipment to access the site. The Fire Department's position is that they do not have enough information to determine this, and they will be available at the City Council meeting to express this concern.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

In light of concerns raised by City Council at the December 11, 2019 public hearing, the recently placed loading restrictions on the Dillon Road Bridge, the Fire Marshal's registered concerns, and recent information obtained from the draft Stormwater Master Plan currently under preparation by the City's consultant, staff is recommending that this item be continued until a traffic study can be prepared for the project by a qualified Traffic Engineer, to include the following items:

- a) An approved scoping plan for the Traffic Study traffic study with recommendations, for the City Engineer's review and approval.
- b) An alignment study, analyzing ultimate and currently proposed turning movements at the intersections of Avenue 50 and Tyler Street (west of the project) and Avenue 50 and Highway 86 Expressway (east of the project).
- c) An analysis of emergency vehicles routing (including fire apparatus) with specific considerations for seasonal flooding of Avenue 50 at Kenmore Street and at Frederick Street, and the current load restrictions and potential future closure of the Dillon Road Bridge over the Coachella Valley Stormwater Channel.
- d) A submittal of the traffic study for review and approval by the City Engineer and the Fire Department. The Fire Department may require a secondary emergency access for the project, based on their review of the traffic study.
- e) Sufficiently detailed plan information for all related ultimate and currently proposed public improvements and dedications for the project.

Due to the extent of off-site sewer and water improvements required for the project, preparation and review of conceptual-level engineering plans and analyses are necessary.

If after the public hearing report and testimony, the City Council is inclined to approve the project, staff can bring back modified conditions of approval to address the above issues. However, the potential drawbacks to this approach is that any major recommendations in the Traffic Study for traffic/circulation planning, may be restricted from being implemented, because the approved project will have had a final determination. At this time staff does not have the necessary information to make an informed recommendation for approval of the project given the issues outlined in this report.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Continue this item for a minimum of 60 to 90 days and direct the applicant to prepare a Traffic Study as explained above.
2. Approval of the project with staff direction to return with modified conditions of approval.
3. Take no action and give staff direction.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There are no fiscal impacts associated with approval or denial of the Coachella Travel Centre project.

RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE(S):

Staff recommends Alternatives #1 or #2 above.