

## **Prescott Council OK's pact that would preserve 475 acres in heart of Dells**

Non-binding letter of intent sets stage for months of review of AED development details

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The details are still to come, but the main points have now been agreed upon for the long-discussed Arizona Eco Development subdivision in Prescott's Granite Dells.

In a unanimous vote on Tuesday, June 9, the Prescott City Council approved a letter of intent with Arizona Eco Development (AED) – the company that plans to develop 850 home lots and a 200-room resort in the heart of the Granite Dells near the popular Peavine Trail.

Among the letter's main components is the preservation of 475 acres of land surrounding the iconic Point of Rocks. In exchange, the city would provide 753 acre-feet of water to AED to serve the company's Granite Dells parcel along with two other parcels to the north and east.

### **'THE START, NOT THE END'**

Although the letter was termed a "landmark" achievement for the three involved parties – the city, AED, and the Save the Dells advocacy group – city officials emphasized repeatedly that it was just the beginning, and not the end, of the review process.

"This sets the framework for what we hope to be a formal, binding agreement," City Attorney Jon Paladini told the council at the start of the discussion. He noted that the letter of intent was a "non-binding" document that was created to work out some of the main issues.

Councilwoman Alexa Scholl said that although it was tempting to ask for the details of the project now, she said, "This is really the 10,000-foot level of this deal."

Still to come are months of review by city staff and the Prescott Planning and Zoning Commission, as well as the public during a required 60-day comment period.

Still, Mayor Greg Mengarelli said the letter of intent marked a major achievement for the three parties, which have been discussing the matter for 2 years or more.

"It has been long and arduous at times, but it is worth it," Mengarelli said. "We're not there yet, but we can see the finish line from here. I do think it's a landmark day."

### **PUBLIC CONCERNS**

Save the Dells, which has pushed all along for the preservation of 500 acres of land in the heart of the Dells, has voiced support for the letter of intent's major points, while noting that many of the details still need to be worked out.

Many of the people who submitted comments brought up concerns about the details as well.

City Clerk Sarah Siep reported that the city had received 46 online comments prior to the meeting. Many of the commenters voiced worries about the ultimate use of two of AED's parcels – K and L – which have been designated as a resort.

Siep said about 20 of the letter writers pushed for a “resort or nothing” requirement for the two parcels, which are located north of the Iron King Trail.

Paladini pointed out that the K and L parcels have already been designated by developer Jason Gisi as a resort, and that “It goes without saying” that the parcels would be developed as a resort.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, space for the public was limited in the council chambers, and most people chose to comment online, although a few spoke at the meeting.

Local resident Judith Merrell pushed for allowing as little contouring and grading of the land as possible and asked that developers “don't just blast out rock formations.”

Merrell also suggested that the one road crossing that is being planned over the Peavine Trail be routed either under or over the trail to separate cars from the hikers and cyclists on the Peavine. “The resort (which requires the crossing) is going to generate a tremendous amount of traffic,” she said.

City Manager Michael Lamar said that although the details have yet to be worked out, the city and Gisi have both committed to finding a way to have a separated crossing over the Peavine.

Others members of the public asked that the developer to leave more open space between houses and the waterway known as No Name Creek, where it joins Granite Creek.

Along with the preservation of the 475 acres, the letter of intent also calls for the city to receive: 270 acres of land near the Prescott Regional Airport; another 131 acres of land near the airport which would be purchased and funded primarily through state and federal money; and the transfer of AED's 375 acre-feet of surface water rights on Watson Lake to the city.

With Tuesday's approval, Gisi is expected to submit an amended annexation proposal for the north parcel (near the airport) and the south parcel (near the Point of Rocks). The other parcel, north of Highway 89A, is not being considered for annexation, but would be served by city water under the terms of the letter of intent.

The entire review process to come is expected to take 4 to 5 months after the AED formal submission.