

April 15, 2019

Chairman Elias

Members of the Pima County Board of Supervisors

131 W. Congress St.

Tucson, Arizona 85701

Re: Bike Ranch CUP

Honorable Supervisors,

Following my discharge from active duty from the U.S. Air Force in April 1971, I enrolled at the University of Arizona, and subsequently earned my M.S. and Ph.D. from the School of Renewable Natural Resources. Following the completion of my M.S. Degree, I worked as a Land Use Planner for Pima County between 1974-79 (one of my primary responsibilities was writing the Hillside Development Zone Ordinance). Next, I was employed as an Environmental Analyst for Tucson Electric Power Company between 1979-84, while I concurrently served on the Pima County Planning Commission between 1980-84. In late December 1984, I was appointed to and served as the Pima County Planning and Development Services Director until February 1989 when I left Tucson, relocated to Irvine, California, to begin employment as the Director of Community Development for the City of Irvine.

Specific to this letter, it was during my employment as Planning & Development Services Director that the Pima County Board of Supervisors adopted the Buffer Overlay Zoning Ordinance and modified the Guest Ranch development requirement and changed its designation to Minor Resort. Because of the role I played in the creation of both the Pima County Buffer Overlay Zoning Ordinance and the Minor Resort CUP process, Kelley Matthews and Peter Lasher, i.e., Elcortijo LLC, retained my services in 2014 to verify the purpose and intended applications of these zoning requirements.

PURPOSE OF THE BUFFER ORDINANCE

From the mid 1970s through the 1980s, Pima County was one of the five fastest growing counties in the United States. At that time, there was a huge demand for affordable homes on 7,200 square foot lots. Large vacant parcels, especially on the creosote flats overlaying the unincorporated lands between the eastern boundary of Tucson and what was then Saguaro National Monument East, were ideal for the construction of new subdivisions. The standard procedure for developing this style of residential development was to scrape away the existing vegetation, flatten the natural landforms and channelize the drainage ways.

As the "scraped earth" housing tracts rapidly migrated east towards Saguaro National Monument, residents' living in the low-density SR-4 buffer adjacent to the park were fearful that many of the large vacant tracts near and adjacent to the Monument would be rezoned and developed at higher densities. National Park rangers were alarmed as well. They dreaded the

intrusion of new subdivisions near or adjacent to the Monument which they believed would result in an influx of domestic pets and invasive non-native plant species migrating into the Park and they were fearful that new housing tracts would close off historic wildlife corridors.

Therefore, in early 1985, and in an effort to protect the natural parks surrounding Tucson from intrusive development, the Board of Supervisors directed planning staff to develop a Buffer Zoning Ordinance. The Board wanted to create a permanent and ecologically sound transition zone between the natural preserves and encroaching urban development. The Board also made it emphatically clear to staff that they did not want an ordinance that prohibited common sense, economically reasonable and appropriate land uses within the buffer areas. In other words, the ordinance was to be designed specifically to prohibit new scraped earth subdivisions from being permitted within a transition zone between an urbanizing Tucson and natural open space parks.

As a result, staff drafted an overlay zone that was intended to force builders and developers to fit new development into the natural landscape i.e., develop outside the 100-year floodplains, protect wildlife habitat, maintain natural wildlife corridors, minimize grading, utilize cluster development, and reduce the visual impact of the development especially from inside the park looking out.

Remarkably, thirty-one years after the adoption of the Buffer Overlay Zone, only the Rocking K Ranch Specific Plan has been approved in the buffer zone. To date only a small part of that plan has been developed due to road access financing.

REASON FOR SUPPORTING THE BIKE RANCH CUP

Is the Bike Ranch development plan consistent with the requirements of the Buffer Zone?

YES

As you are aware the application before you is for a **Conditional Use Permit for a Minor Resort;** the underlying **Suburban Ranch zoning will not be changed.**

It is my opinion that the proposed Bike Ranch development plan exceeds the intent & requirements of the Buffer Overlay Zone Ordinance by:

- Ensuring an ecologically sound transition between the National Park and urban land uses.
- Protecting critical and sensitive wildlife habitat.
- Fostering the unimpeded movement of wildlife in and out of the National Park.
- Allows for an economically and reasonable use of a vacant parcel of land.


The Bike Ranch development plan goes further by:

- Clustering the guest suites in the north eastern portion of the property.

- Protecting all drainageways that serve as wildlife corridors.
- Respecting the natural desert ambiance by creating a cluster development, with low to earth casitas that are designed to flow with the natural terrain.
- Designing a building complex that replicates traditional guest ranch architecture.
- Creating a building complex that will strive to meet a LEED Platinum rating.
- Serving a regional need by creating a comprehensive travel destination for avid bicyclists.
- Creating new jobs.

Therefore, I strongly recommend that you approve The Bike Ranch CUP.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert C. Johnson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert C. Johnson Ph.D.
Irvine, California