

## Zoning Challenges of CCRCs

**S**everal months ago I wrote about the trend toward Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs). These are planned senior communities that allow residents to “age in place.” Younger, more active residents begin their stay in one of the casitas or apartment-type homes along the perimeter of the community where they are offered services such as meal preparation, fitness, personal care, physical therapy, medical, spiritual and social services. As residents age and their needs change, there are options to move into a higher care assisted living facility or memory care unit. If and when they need the highest level of care, a healthcare center is generally provided for either temporary or permanent care. This progression of services is designed to provide a sense of stability and comfort by ensuring that a full range of amenities are available to serve both present and future needs all within one community.

The Planning Center has been involved in the development of some of these facilities. As a relatively new housing concept that contains a range of residential opportunities and support services, CCRCs face some unique zoning and development challenges. The following are some of the issues that have arisen on these projects:

**Appropriate Zoning Classification:** Although CCRCs are primarily residential communities, their success and popularity is partially due to the fact that they provide a wide range of personal services onsite for their residents. These services range from a variety of restaurants, cocktail lounges, coffee shops, movie theater, barber/hair salon and banking/financial services. Although these services are intended to be solely for the use of the CCRC’s residents and their guests, some jurisdictions view the entire use as a commercial operation, and require commercial zoning.

**Location:** Again, due to the fact that the primary function of CCRCs is to provide housing, the ideal location for CCRCs is in areas that tend to be quieter and more residential in nature. Also, many seniors desire to be able to stay near friends and family in a familiar neighborhood, and don’t want to move to a busier, more commercial area. This is in conflict with the need for commercial zoning. And, in suburban areas, commercial rezonings to accommodate CCRCs are met with a variety of neighborhood concerns. These include:

**Building Heights:** Typically, CCRCs require 3-4 stories of height. This is important to develop the community in a compact fashion that will minimize distances that people need to walk to get to services. It is also important from a staff efficiency standpoint. Because Tucson is a very low-density low-profile community, increases in building heights over 1-2 stories is nearly always met with resistance. Developers need to be prepared to present detailed view analyses, photo simulations and/or architectural renderings and will likely be required to provide increased building setbacks or transitions of building heights and to be sensitive to building locations in relation to neighboring property owners.

**Traffic:** Although CCRCs tend to be relatively low traffic generators (since most residents either no longer drive or limit their driving), there is a perception that the increased density will result in a dramatic increase in traffic. Also, concerns are sometimes raised about the safety of a concentration of older drivers from such a facility.

**Noise:** Neighbors are often concerned about noise, particularly from garbage pickup, deliveries and emergency ambulance calls.

**Property Values:** Neighbors are also often concerned about a potential decrease in their property values due to the commercial zoning as well as the above list of perceived impacts.

Although none of these issues are particularly unique to up-zonings, they become amplified in the case of CCRCs because of the perceived intensity of use in a residential setting. In reality, CCRCs can be excellent neighbors when planned and developed in a sensitive manner. The Splendido community in Oro Valley is an example where a CCRC has been successfully integrated into a residential community. As with any entitlement process, early and open communication with neighboring property owners is the key to success.



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