

Valley Ho Charrette

Site Selection

The idea for the design charrette originated with the City Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The Incentives Committee of the HPC had been working during the past year to proactively develop approaches that addressed the preservation needs of buildings that might be designated on the Scottsdale Historic Register. It was felt that owner support for the designation of their properties might be gained if there were clear and tangible benefits associated with the designation.

After reviewing properties identified in the Downtown Survey as potentially eligible for historic designation, it was recognized that the HPC must develop ways to balance preservation goals with new development that will be needed to maintain a property's economic viability.

Conducting a design charrette was identified as a means of gaining a better understanding of the issues associated with the redevelopment of historic properties. A "charrette" is a process used frequently by the design community to intensively explore design options for a particular site within a concentrated time period.

In March 2001, the Incentives Committee discussed the Ramada Valley Ho Hotel as a possible candidate for a charrette. Factors discussed as important to such an undertaking included:

- Identified historic and/or architectural significance;

- Potential threats to its preservation without some type of formal protection;

- Large and complex site warranting the charrette approach; and

- Owner(s) willing to have their property analyzed.

Given these considerations, it was determined that the Ramada Valley Ho Hotel property would be an appropriate site to experiment with the effectiveness of the charrette process. A proposal describing the proposed undertaking was submitted on April 10, 2001 to the Central Arizona Chapter Board of Directors of the American Institute of Architects seeking their co-sponsorship. From the outset it was recognized, that the various master plan scenarios generated for the property would simply serve as ideas for discussion and there would be no decision to pursue any particular concept after the session.

Charrette Process

Fifteen participants were assembled for the daylong charrette from different professional backgrounds including architecture, planning, real estate, development, preservation, and architectural history. They represented both the private and public sectors.

The day began with a field tour of the Ramada Valley Ho Hotel property and introduction to the property owner. The group reconvened at the Chaparral Suites Hotel and shared their initial impressions. Brief presentations were made about the property's history and significance as well as relevant zoning, planning and land use considerations. Briefly together as a group, the participants discussed the potential for preservation and redevelopment. The larger group then divided into three small work teams. These teams each developed a master plan option for the site.

Upon completion of their concept plans, each group presented their plan and the rationale for its development. Similarities in the plans were identified and they were critiqued as to their effectiveness in achieving preservation and market place viability goals. The participants returned to their small work groups to refine and/or revise their plans to address the feedback received.

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History and Significance of the Property

By the 1950s Scottsdale had become a major tourist destination. The decade after World War II had seen the expansion of a wide array of accommodations to lure vacationers and seasonal residents. The Valley Ho Hotel opened for business as Scottsdale's first year round resort in 1956. Built by Evelyn and Robert Foehl, the hotel first sustained its operations housing Motorola's new employees while they looked for permanent homes. However, its large suites and rooms with private sun decks and other resort amenities soon attracted celebrities and other clientele that the Foehl's met through their resort operations in California. As its popularity grew, the complex was expanded in 1958 to include additional rooms.

Designed by Edward L. Varney Associates, the two story buildings utilizes distinctive masonry and concrete and other features reflective of Frank Lloyd Wright's influence on mid-twentieth century architecture. The character-defining features of the property include:

Form

Complex with multiple buildings arranged in a random pattern on the site

Strong horizontal emphasis to the building forms

Building massing has an organic quality

Stories articulated with a variety of treatments

Flat roofs with wide overhangs

Prominent entry feature

Materials

Predominance of masonry: brick, stone

Stone work serves as bases or defines corners or entrances

Glass walls and large expanses of glazing

Building planes have one primary material (masonry or glass)

Ornate precast concrete railings and facias

Setting

Buildings and walls frame various interior and/or landscaped areas

Traditional landscape features and materials

Property boundaries lack definition

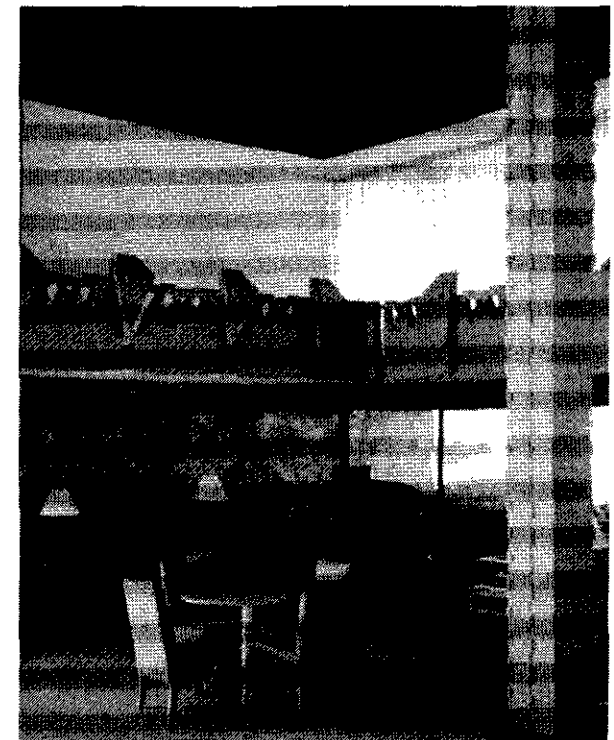
Building Features & Workmanship

Cantilevered balconies are primary design element

Distinctive geometric forms (cast concrete and metal) used throughout complex

Striking motif used for balcony & stair railings and to define porte cochere roof

Entry feature composed of typical "Taliesin" treatment: low ceiling entrance that opens to a large interior volume of space



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Site Considerations

Assets

High Visibility:

Property is located at the highly visible and prominent west entry to downtown on a major road, Indian School Road. Visitors to the downtown from the airport, Phoenix and from the south and west often use 64th Street and Indian School Road to reach downtown Scottsdale. The 101 Freeway off-ramp to the west at Indian School Road has significantly increased vehicular traffic volumes on this major arterial.

Investor Interest:

There has been evidence of interest from investors and developers in this downtown location. Prospective buyers have been in contact with the property owner. Architects have prepared conceptual plans for redevelopment of the property for potential clients. Interest in the property and the potential for new investment in the property appears high.

Opportunity for Intensification:

The existing low density relative to the Scottsdale Downtown Plan and Zoning Ordinance means there are opportunities for increasing intensity of uses. Charrette participants agreed that the site was currently underutilized and could support some intensification of use while still being compatible with the surrounding area.

Proximity to downtown amenities:

The property offers excellent access to the downtown for a variety of activities including the highest concentration of art galleries in the state, shopping, cultural facilities, and restaurants. Many opportunities are within one mile of the hotel and several can be reached by walking, such as galleries and stores on Main Street.

Attractive historic character and features:

The older buildings north of Main Street have architectural features and a historic character worth preserving. The architects and historians alike felt the arrangement of buildings, their use of materials and the detailing as well as the strong horizontal emphasis created a distinctive character for the site.

Sturdy Construction:

The early buildings were constructed to last and could be upgraded or renovated. Buildings were constructed of concrete and masonry with stone defining the corners and entrances.

Liabilities

Under-utilized site:

The current density is very low relative to high downtown land values. Since the hotel was constructed on the west end of Main Street, land values have increased substantially and room rates and amenities for hotels have increased.

Redevelopment pressure:

There is pressure to redevelop the property because of the older buildings, the need to reposition hotel in the market, and to increase return on investment relative to land values.

Poor front door location:

The poorly located existing front entry makes it hard for visitors to see the hotel from Indian School Road, the high volume adjacent street.

Limited access:

There is limited vehicle and pedestrian access to the site with the existing arrangements of driveways and entrances.

Lack of Character:

The buildings on the south side of Main Street lack significant architectural features and are less distinct from other hotels than the buildings north of Main Street.

Street bisects property:

Main Street bisects the property and makes the hotel less visually cohesive.

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Background Information

Several points about the property came out in the discussions in addition to the assets and liabilities mentioned above. A list of some of the most pertinent facts follows. Additional background information can be found in attachments or supplemental information.

Size of Property:

+/-12.5 acres

Main Street Area:

Approximately 3/4 acres within Right-of-Way

Traffic Signals:

Corner of Indian School Road and 68th Street; corner of Goldwater Boulevard and East Main Street.

Hotel Rooms:

292 rooms, two-story buildings

Estimated Building Size:

Approximately 65,000 square feet

Entry:

North side of Main Street between 68th and 69th Streets

Other Facilities:

Restaurant, banquet rooms, pools, and meeting and conference rooms

Zoning:

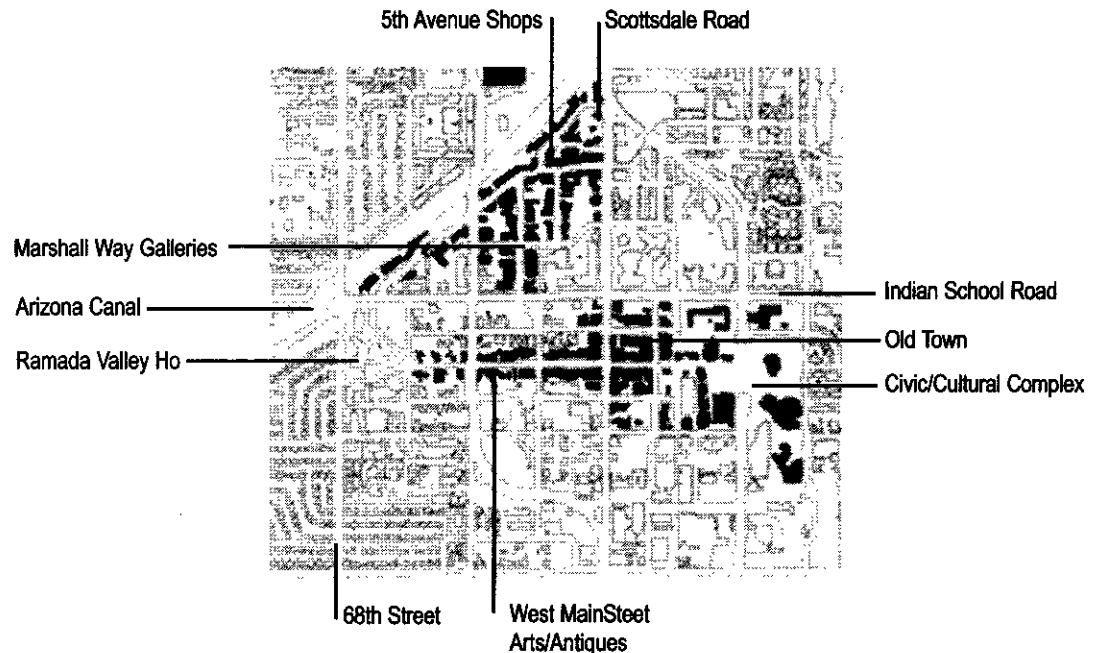
C-3 Highway Commercial District, intended to permit most types of commercial activity. Permitted floor area ratio is .8 net lot area. Maximum height is 36'. Setbacks range from 50' to 0' depending on adjacent use.

General Plan:

Downtown Land Use Plan in Scottsdale General Plan shows RH-2 Residential/Hotel category with intermediate type development. A Downtown District rezoning compatible with the General Plan would permit a hotel with a maximum height with bonuses of 72' and 8 floors maximum in the Type 2 area.

Utilities and Infrastructure:

Indian School Road was widened to six-lane with a raised landscaped median recently. Water, sewer, and electrical services currently serve the property and storm drains were installed along 2nd Street to the southeast and on Goldwater Boulevard one block east. The capacity for increasing the volumes or demands on existing facilities has not been studied.



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Concept Plan - Group A

Building/Site Analysis

Site divided into Historic Hotel (100 rooms), Condominiums/Time share (50 condos) and Upscale Lodging. Add new five story wing to take advantage of views

Expand the existing kitchen to serve new conference center and a remodeled hotel restaurant.

Corner of 68th street and Indian School to serve as gateway to the city.

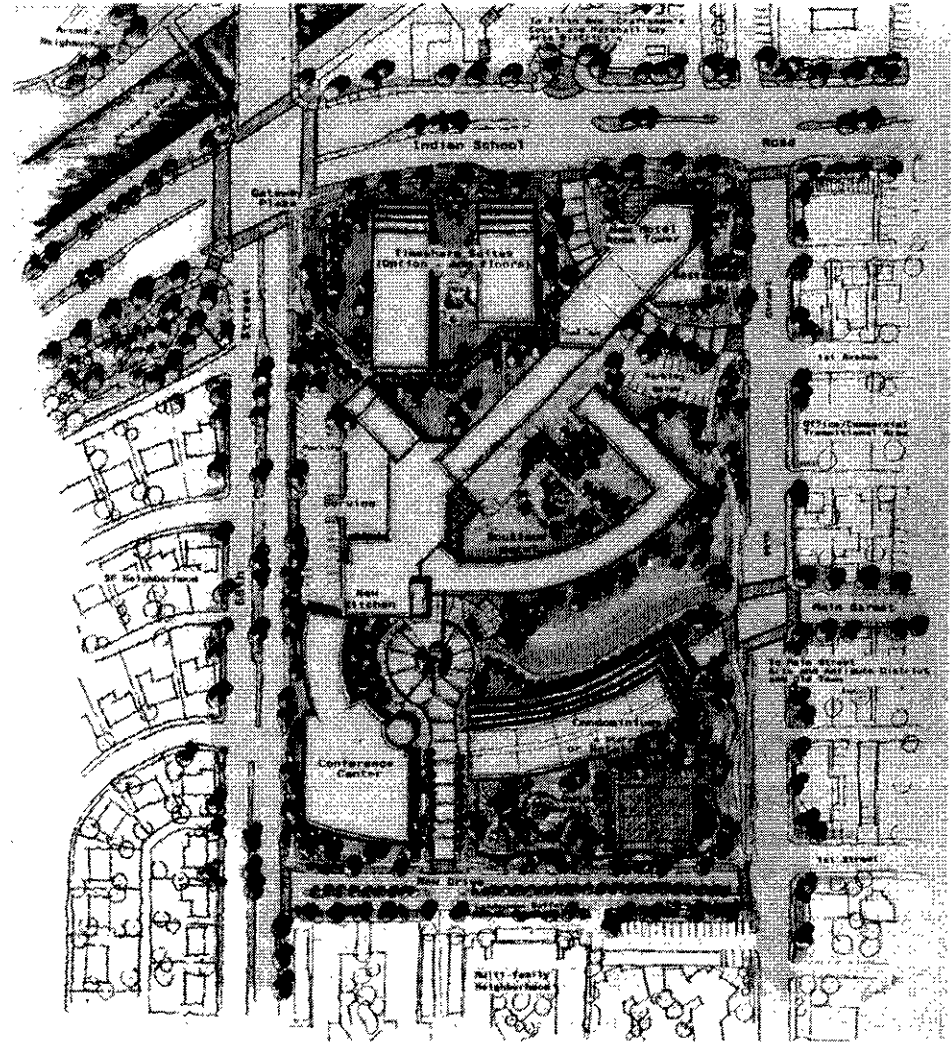
Resort needs access point off of Indian School Road.

Concept Features

Add a restaurant in prominent location on the northeast corner

Main Street will extend into site as a pedestrian walkway terminating at the historic hotel entrance. View of the tower entry feature from downtown - along Main Street - is maintained.

Shaded walkways connect the buildings. The design of the shade structure is a contemporary interpretation of the geometric forms used on the historic buildings.



Participants: Jeremy Jones, Debbie Abele, and Bob Wood

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Concept Plan - Group B

Building/Site Analysis

Existing building massing remains as exists

Upgrade 150 existing rooms

) Renovate 88 units to 44 timeshare units

84 new multi-family residential units to the south

Add new penthouse

New below grade parking facility at south end

Fitness/health center at northeast corner

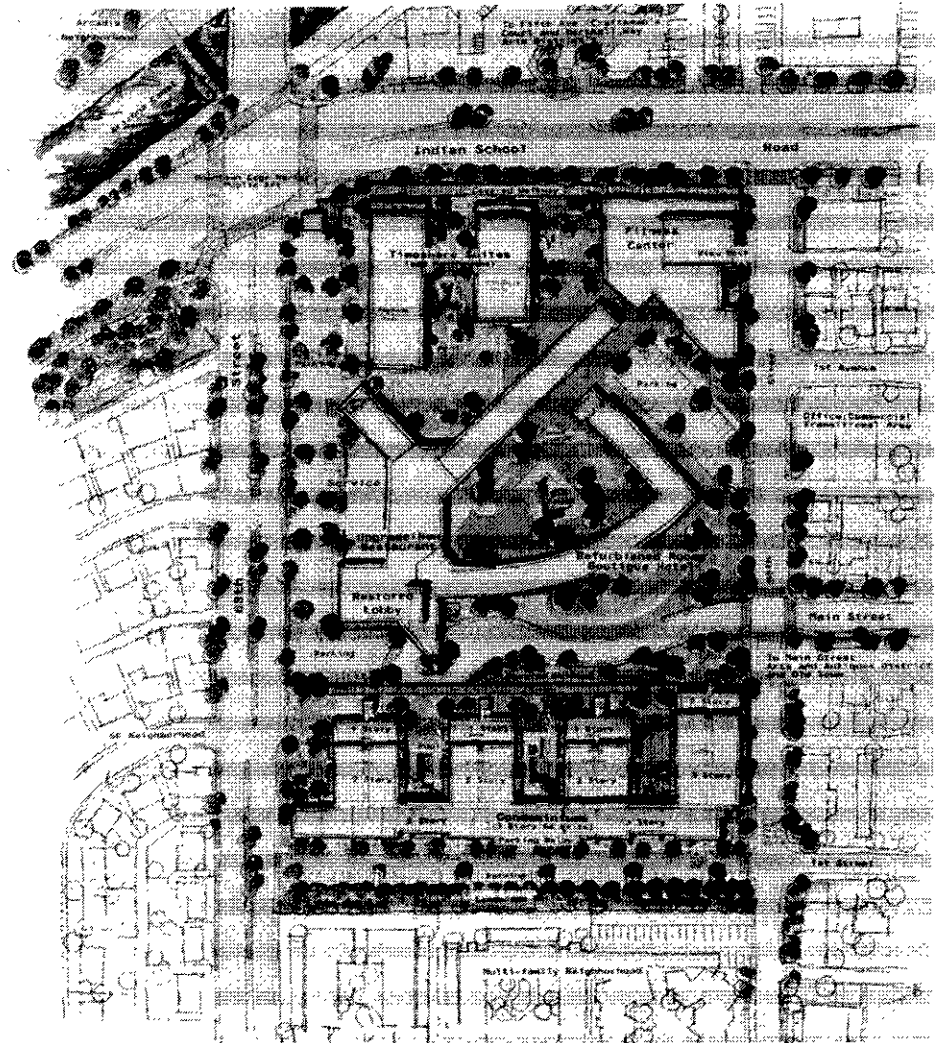
Concept features

) Respect nature of existing outdoor spaces and influences in the size and character of new courtyards and patios

Terminate Main Street in a defined court area flanked by curved wing of hotel

Add vertical public art at Northwest corner

Buffer neighbors to the south



Participants: Doug Sydnor, Roger Brevoort, Andrew Klamon

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Points of Agreement

The charrette participants compared the ideas and conceptual plans from the three groups and identified several points of agreement as follows:

Entrance Structure:

All groups kept the entry structure as either the entrance or as part of a restaurant.

Maintain Historic Character/Features:

The groups made an effort to maintain the 1956 and 1958 hotel buildings north of Main Street, because of its appreciated integrity, historic character and significance of the buildings and the aesthetics of the architectural design.

Abundant Open Space:

The three conceptual plans still maintain a substantial amount of open space on the site, particularly around the 1956-58 buildings. This would continue the existing ambiance and good indoor/outdoor connection.

Added Value:

Each group individually and working together as a team sought design solutions that would add value to the total property to justify keeping the more important older buildings. Increasing the value of the property through rehabilitation and new construction can support the high land value and reposition the property to suit current market conditions.

Time-Share Units:

A significant number of time share units were included in each plan. This will add revenue to make it financially feasible to keep the historically significant hotel buildings.

Low Floor Area Ratio Proposed:

The conceptual plans from each group added some square footage to the property. The resulting floor area ratio would still be low compared to the maximum allowable under the Downtown zoning and bonuses.

Relocate Street:

The existing Main Street right-of-way location through the middle of the property was considered detrimental to the efficient utilization of the property. All groups eliminated the intersection of Main Street and 68th Street and some or all of the street was proposed to be abandoned. The team assumed that there is minimal traffic on the west end of Main Street.

New Access to South:

A new east-west drive is proposed for the south side of the property to replace the east-west Main Street alignment. This access relocation supports better site utilization and enhances the redevelopment of the southern part of the overall property.



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Proposed Program of Uses

The best conceptual program of uses for the property identified in the design charrette include:

Repositioned Hotel

Site very suitable for a hotel that is rehabilitated as a "boutique" hotel with 50-100 guest rooms that have been enlarged and upgraded with new kitchens and baths. Higher but moderate room rates could be achieved with these. Each group had varying numbers of renovated and new hotel rooms.

Shared Front Desk/Services

A centralized front desk and hotel services could be shared with compatible residential/hotel uses such as condominiums and time shares. Other uses could be put into one rental pool.

Time Shares

The existing two buildings (wings 5 and 6) on the northwest corner of the property could be renovated into time shares resulting in about 50 time share units and could use the hotel lobby. Alternatively, about 70 new time share units could be constructed on the northwest corner of the site.

Condominiums

About 100 condominiums with an average of 1600 SF each on three levels could be located on the southern 4 +/- acres of the property with access from a new street or drive. An underground parking structure could be located below the units.

Mixed Residential Use

The number of proposed units and the actual placement of the uses on the site varies for the hotel, time share, condominium and rental units.

Restaurant or Fitness Center/Spa

Redevelop the northeast corner of the site and replace the tennis courts with a major public restaurant (10,000-12,000 SF), a fitness center and/or a spa.

Maintain Historic Buildings/ Landscape

Character The mix of a renovated boutique hotel, time shares, condos and a public restaurant on the property are projected to be of sufficient value in sales or income stream to fit the market area and maintain some of the historic buildings and landscape character.

Pedestrian Amenities

Add pedestrian amenities around the site. Ideas varied and included a covered pedestrian walkway along Indian School Road, a feature where Main Street ends on the property, outdoor dining patios, upgraded landscape, and other outdoor areas. Conceptual plans continue to emphasize large pedestrian and landscape areas as an important visual characteristic of the early hotel.

Added or Improved Services/Conference Center

The amount of space allocated to the uses varied but the teams agreed upon a new commercial kitchen, hotel restaurant and banquet facilities, improved or added meeting and conference rooms and other interior renovations.

Demolish buildings South of Main Street

The team was in agreement that the buildings south of Main Street could be demolished to make room for new construction because the structures were not considered historically significant and/or to possess historic integrity. Proposed new uses varied.

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Feasibility Analysis

Reviewing the historic Valley Ho Hotel alternatives produced by the design charrette, I had the following thoughts:

All three of the alternatives recognize that rehabilitating the historic core of the Valley Ho as a smaller boutique hotel is a viable option. I strongly concur in this conclusion. Even though the hotel occupancies in the Valley have recently hit rock bottom, there continues to be a demand for differentiated and interesting boutique products. Currently, one of the hottest trends in the lodging is the renovated 1950's modern hotel (see for example, Preservation Magazine, July/August 2001; National Geographic Traveller, September 2001;). Phoenix does not have a small boutique hotel in this niche market. Furthermore, the architectural quality of the original Valley Ho Hotel building is far greater than most of the modern boutique hotels which have been developed in Palm Springs, Miami and elsewhere.

All of the options acknowledge that for a boutique hotel to survive at this location it needs a different arrival point. I also concur with the conclusion that the intersection corner at Indian School Road and 68th Street is extremely underutilized. That corner should either become a new entrance point or a new front lobby itself.

The best alternative may be the one which puts a separate restaurant at the corner. Economically, the desirable aspect of this is that restaurant could be sold off as a separate "pad" to be developed by a freestanding restaurant with relationships to the hotel. That would make the amount of land dedicated to the single use hotel somewhat smaller. Economically, it seems desirable to try to peel off some of this property into other uses.

All three of the schemes propose closing Main Street through the site. While this is desirable in terms of recapturing more property for redevelopment, I am concerned that political or economic arguments might be made against this proposal. Since it is, after all, "Main Street," there may be controversy in abandoning any portion it. As a link between 68th, a major north/south corridor, and the businesses of the Downtown, the Main Street access may be a route which those businesses do not want to see severed. The viability of closing down Main Street through the property should be considered carefully.

All of the schemes decide that the buildings to the south side of Main Street have no significant historic value and that area could be redeveloped. If the consistent vision is to develop a smaller boutique hotel, then the question is for what use is the excess property suitable? At one point, there was an expectation in Scottsdale that much of this property could be redeveloped with office buildings. That seems unrealistic now in light of all of the vacant space near downtown Scottsdale. It also seems obvious that this site is simply too far away from Scottsdale Road to have significant retail demand. The reality, therefore, is that condo or timeshare residential units are the most logical use at this location. Downtown Scottsdale has been somewhat past over in the recent "urban in-fill" rush to build higher density housing as in downtown Tempe and downtown Phoenix. This seems a perfect site to take advantage of that possibility. Accordingly, all three of the schemes propose that the area on the south side of Main Street would best be used for condominium or timeshare units.

by Grady Gammage Jr.

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Conclusion

The June 30, 2001 design charrette was an important first step for the Scottsdale HPC's efforts to develop viable preservation plans for properties proposed for designation on the Scottsdale Historic Register and understand the complexities of preserving aging commercial properties. The participants left the session optimistic that a historic hotel in the downtown could be preserved and be redeveloped with a variety of economically viable uses. Each of the teams demonstrated that the Ramada Valley Ho Hotel site could accommodate new buildings and uses while preserving the character-defining features of the historic complex. It was shown that historic preservation, redevelopment and financial goals could be met with an appropriate site plan, rezoning consistent with the Downtown Plan and an owner or developer willing to work with the constraints and opportunities represented by the existing conditions.

There was general agreement that the Ramada Valley Ho Hotel needs to "reposition" itself in response to the Valley's and Scottsdale's over-built hospitality market. Rehabilitating the existing 1956-58 buildings into a historic "boutique" hotel with approximately 100 guest rooms was identified as a way to distinguish the complex from other lodging currently offered. However, existing

rooms would need to be expanded, upgraded and supplemented with additional guestrooms. Upgraded resort amenities also are needed. Providing additional but complementary residential and/or commercial uses on the property was seen as necessary as well to generate additional income.

More than one program of new uses could work on the site with a mixture of building heights and massing that would be compatible with the range of other uses in the area. Proposed new or renovated uses included: a free standing restaurant (10,000 -12,000 square feet), time-share units, condominiums, apartments, additional upscale hotel rooms, luxury penthouse(s), expanded banquet and meeting rooms, a relocated front entrance and lobby, a health club or spa and conference facilities.

The results of the Valley Ho design charrette will be initially presented to the property owner, the Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission, the Central Arizona Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Scottsdale City Council. Further actions will be based upon the response of the owner and prospective investors and developers to the concepts generated at the charrette.





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