

## Potential Talking Points

### OPPOSITION to Proposed “VERDIN” Taylor Morrison Development

#### Quick Talking Points & Requests

- For much of Phoenix’s modern history, our PMPC membership has worked hard alongside hundreds of concerned Phoenix citizens and City staff to ensure that the Sonoran Desert Preserves are protected and maintained as a valuable resource for all citizens of Phoenix.
- We also support the critical protections Phoenix has enacted to prohibit intense development in and around the Cave Creek Wash area outlined in the Desert Maintenance Overlay District (Desert Overlay). These protections should be kept intact, without compromise.
- The Desert Overlay was enacted by Ordinance specifically to protect the Cave Creek Wash area – located directly between the Sonoran Desert Preserves – from intense residential development, like the massive “Verdin” development, proposed by Taylor Morrison.
- The proposed Taylor Morrison “Verdin” development would be the first one within the Desert Overlay area, and will set a disastrous precedent if allowed to move forward, totally bypassing the Desert Overlay.
- PMPC does not oppose a development on Taylor Morrison’s property, but it must be consistent with the development standards and zoning requirements that exist today.
- Doing anything short of this will seriously degrade fragile desert ecosystems in this area, sever the connection between the two Preserves, and set a dangerous precedent – where developers can easily bypass important Overlay protections for our unique landscapes across Phoenix.
- The City of Phoenix should not allow this. Phoenix has already spoken on this matter with the approval of the approval of the Desert Overlay.

#### Background

- For many decades, protecting and preserving the unique desert features of the Phoenix Sonoran Preserve and the surrounding area has been a priority for the City of Phoenix.

- During the 1990s, in recognition of the value of (and growing threats to) the Preserves, the enormously successful Arizona Preserve Initiative was developed to acquire sensitive Preserve areas for permanent protection. Thousands of acres of the Preserve lands, such as in the Cave Creek Wash area, became part of the Sonoran Preserve and many other treasured sites were acquired under this voter-approved and citizen-funded initiative.
- Members of the PMPC were involved in these efforts at the earliest moments, including participating in the initial Sonoran Preserve Committee, that was formed to analyze and decide which lands should be acquired by the City to be set aside as open space and permanently protected.
- Many who are familiar with this history may also remember the successful North Sonoran Collaborative – a team of ASU researchers, City representatives, and others – whose methodical and scientific research helped develop the Sonoran Preserve boundaries and edges, which were based on unique ecosystem features, not land ownership or topography.

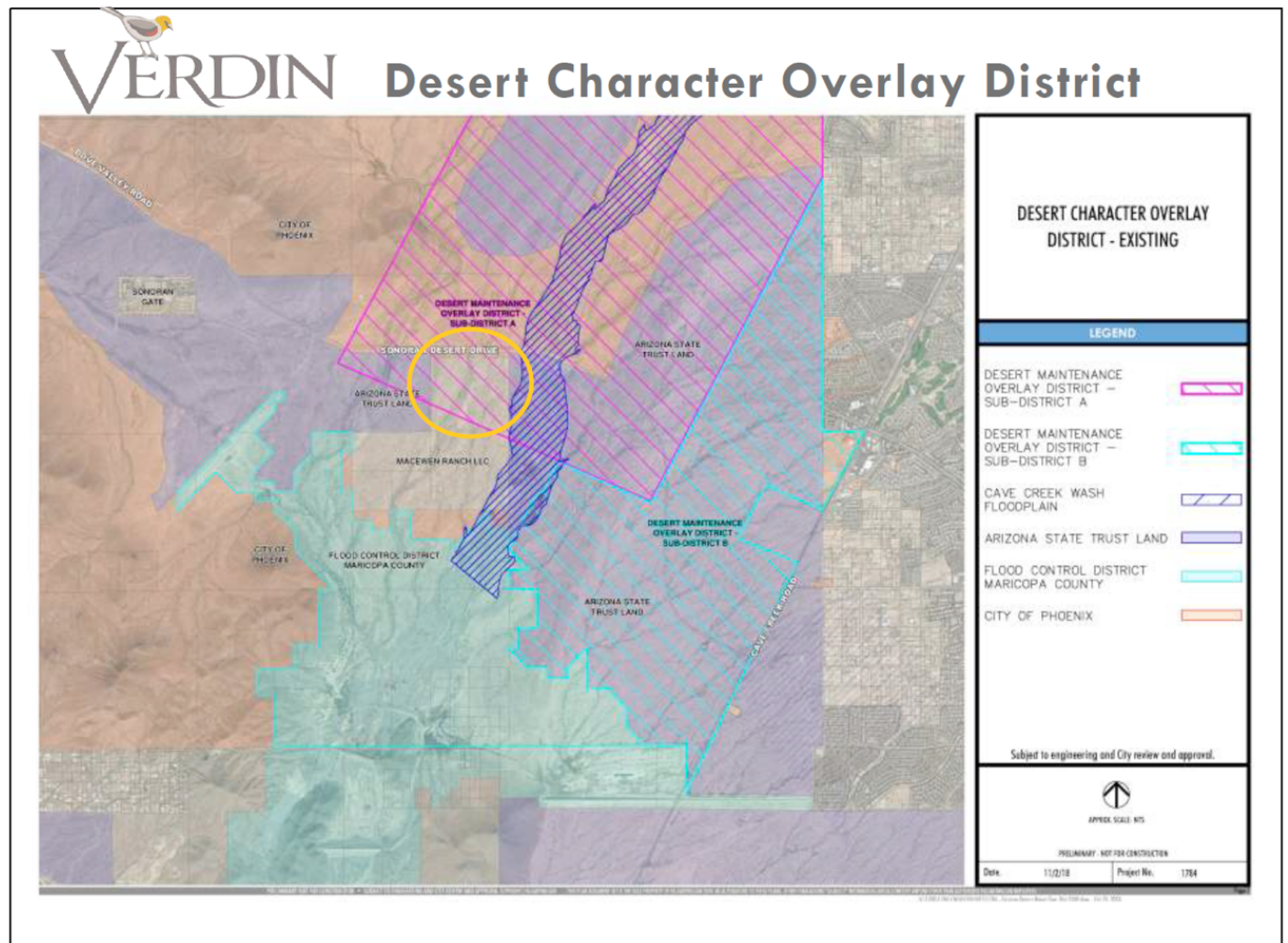
**The Verdin Development Will Bifurcate the Sonoran Preserve and Destroy Important Habitat and Features Currently Protected by the City of Phoenix’s Desert Overlay Ordinance**

- The proposed Taylor Morrison “Verdin” housing development would build hundreds of houses just south of Sonoran Desert Drive on about 480 acres of undisturbed desert land. The property is wedged between the north/south segments of the Sonoran Preserve. Mesquite Wash – which is important habitat for many desert species – runs through the heart of the property.
- The development area would also intrude on Cave Creek Wash to the east of the property, which is an important wildlife corridor between the two Preserves. The development is also adjacent to undisturbed State Trust Lands that Phoenix has long considered as ripe to add to the Preserves.
- Significantly, a large portion of the proposed development is located in “Sub-District A” of the Desert Maintenance Overlay District (Desert Overlay).
- The Desert Overlay was enacted, among other things, to “maintain the fragile undisturbed areas and the wildlife corridor along the Cave Creek Wash” and to “guide development that will blend with the undisturbed desert environment rather than dominate it.” Section. 653, Phoenix Zoning Ordinance. For a map of the Overlay relative to the proposed development, see Attachment A.
- The Desert Overlay, which was adopted by Phoenix in 2001, was carefully researched, scientifically grounded, and thoughtfully formulated to protect the Preserve, its edges, its access, and this exquisite desert environment.

- While some residential development is permitted in Sub-District A, the development must be of a “very low density, scale and intensity” due to the “many washes to be maintained in an undisturbed condition crossing this area...”. See Section 653, Phoenix City Zoning Ordinance.
- And yet, while the Desert Overlay was expressly adopted by Phoenix to protect the “fragile undisturbed desert” from intense, developments just like the proposed “Verdin” development, Taylor Morrison is now asking the City of Phoenix to abandon the critical protections afforded by the Overlay in this area, even though the Overlay was overwhelmingly supported and, notably, has never been changed or amended in over 20 years.
- A decision to cast aside the carefully developed protections in the Desert Overlay would be devastating to the fragile desert environment of Mesquite Wash and Cave Creek Wash and the animals and plants that make these washes their home. Including one of our smallest native birds – the Verdin – who makes its home in the arroyos and washes of the desert southwest, like in Mesquite and Cottonwood Wash.
- The Verdin development would also sever the connection between the two Sonoran Preserves and cut off important wildlife corridors that connect these Preserves.
- Also, because the Desert Overlay is just one of several written and planned Overlays enacted to protect open space and our fragile desert environment across Phoenix, a decision by the City of Phoenix to remove these carefully enacted protections at the mere request of Taylor Morrison would set a dangerous precedent for Phoenix and the future of region.
- In recent presentations, Taylor Morrison appears to be “moving the goal posts” to push its intense develop forward. Specifically, it is now arguing that its property is not actually included in the Desert Overlay at all!
- This is because they contend that the southern boundary of the Desert Overlay was only intended to extend as far south as Sonoran Desert Drive, which would conveniently remove all of the Overlay’s protections for Mesquite Wash and the fragile desert environment on Taylor Morrison’s land.
- PMPC has looked into Taylor Morrison’s argument, and we can find no basis to support their suggestion that the Desert Overlay should be contracted as they suggest.
- The boundaries of both the Desert Overlay and Sonoran Desert Drive were designed with the specific goals of protecting sensitive desert habitat, including preserving the health of major wash crossings in the 100-year floodplain. This includes the southern boundary of the Desert Overlay.

- There is simply no support for Taylor Morrison's contention that the boundary would contract at some point in the future based on the final alignment of the east – west roadway we now call Sonoran Desert Drive.
- Everything PMPC has looked at shows that this east - west roadway was designed to pass through the Preserve and Overlay District – NOT to border it like Taylor Morrison is asking here. Their claim is inconsistent with the scientifically based approach that was used when the boundaries of the Desert Overlay were developed and approved by Phoenix – boundaries that were set based on the geographic location of important desert features, like Cave Creek Wash, and not human designed road alignments.
- It is also noteworthy that the 480 acres that Taylor Morrison seeks to develop have been owned by one owner since the 1960s. They had ample opportunity to participate in the development of the Desert Overlay when it was enacted into Section 653 of the Phoenix Zoning Ordinance in 2001.
- To the extent they believed the boundaries of the Overlay should not include their property or Mesquite Wash they could have said so at the time.
- Instead, the Sonoran Overlay was overwhelmingly approved. Taylor Morrison should not be allowed to do an end run around the Overlay's important requirements now, over 20 years later.

TALKING POINTS – VERDIN DEVELOPMENT  
ATTACHMENT 1



\*Slide taken from “VERDIN – a TaylorMorrison Community, Informational Presentation” (undated).