

Recently, the Planning Commission approved two related items for parcel S-137-C—the Town-owned property next to Town Hall:

- Item A2: A zone change from Valley Residential (VR) to Public Use (PU).
- Item A3: A code amendment adding medical offices, pharmacies, and clinics as permitted uses in the PU zone.

Although presented separately, these actions are inseparable; without the zone change, the amendment has no effect. Yet the Commission approved both within ten minutes—without a single question or substantial discussion. No site plans or architectural renderings were shown, only aerial photos and unrelated building images. Someone even remarked that the new structure would “blend right in,” even though no design had ever been seen.

This approval relied on a concept, not confirmed design. Commissioners also claimed nearby residents would face little impact, without evidence. In past years, as we all know, private citizens requesting far less significant zone changes have faced rigorous scrutiny. When resident Matt Ryaner proposed a zoning change at 975 Zion Park Boulevard, he was questioned in detail about design, materials, and landscaping, with meeting minutes spanning nine pages before his request was finally denied. Why did town owned parcel S-137-C receive such cursory review?

More fundamentally, what problem is this project solving? Commissioners asked no questions about existing clinic capacity, future use of the parcel, or alternative community benefits. Instead of beginning with an open discussion about how best to use Town-owned land, the process jumped directly to approving a predefined medical and pharmacy concept. By the time this reaches the Town Council for a formal public hearing, the decision will already be mostly settled—leaving little room for genuine public input.

From a policy standpoint, the Town must ask whether the best use of this property is a municipally backed medical complex or a project that better serves long-identified needs such as workforce housing. The Council has repeatedly acknowledged the housing shortage. This parcel could demonstrate leadership by incorporating both housing and limited healthcare facilities. A simple VR-to-Village Commercial (VC) rezoning could accomplish that transparently, yet staff chose a more convoluted path: VR to PU, then a code change redefining PU to include private medical operations.

This workaround appears designed to bypass prior precedent. A similar VC rezoning request along Lion Boulevard came before the Council in 2019: was debated, and ultimately denied. The new approach essentially revives that idea under a different label.

The deeper issue lies in redefining “public use.” Providing a public benefit does not automatically make a project a public use; otherwise, any business claiming to help residents could occupy public land. Traditionally, PU zones accommodate facilities truly owned or operated by government or public entities—schools, parks, and utilities—not private clinics or pharmacies, even nonprofit ones.

Ultimately, the issue is not one parcel but the integrity of Springdale’s planning process. Zoning decisions involving public property must prioritize openness, transparency, and equal treatment. If the Town can rezone its own land in minutes, while residents face exhaustive review, public trust suffers. Springdale’s identity has always rested on deliberate planning and community involvement. Before moving forward, the Town should slow down, engage its citizens, and ensure this project—whatever form it takes—genuinely serves the public good.

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