



## City of Phoenix

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

**Staff Report: Z-7-21-4**  
**April 27, 2021**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Z-7-21-4 is a request to establish Historic Preservation (HP) overlay zoning for the property located at the southwest corner of Central Avenue and Pierson Street [4750 North Central Avenue], known historically as **Camelback Towers (now Landmark Towers)**. Maps and photos of the subject property are attached.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that rezoning request Z-7-21-4 be approved.

### **BACKGROUND**

In July of 2020, Jolene Beard, representing the Landmark Towers Condominiums association, contacted the City of Phoenix Historic Preservation Office to inquire about HP zoning for the subject property. After researching the property, staff made a recommendation on August 5, 2020 that it was eligible for historic designation. Ms. Beard then submitted formal paperwork requesting that the City proceed with an application for HP zoning in December of 2020. At the request of the owner, the HP Commission voted to initiate HP zoning for the subject property on December 21, 2020.

### **PROPERTY HISTORY**

Camelback Towers was one of the earliest high-rise residential buildings in Phoenix outside of the downtown area. Prior to 1957, there were no high-rise buildings outside of downtown Phoenix, and those located within downtown were commercial in nature. The impetus for high-rise residential development began with the Phoenix Towers, a 14-story apartment building completed at Central Avenue and Monte Vista Road in 1957. Four additional residential high-rise developments, including Camelback Towers, would be constructed along the midtown corridor (McDowell Road to Camelback Road and from 7<sup>th</sup> Street to 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue) by 1966.

In 1958, New York developer Milton Saper purchased the 1.66-acre Tony Belle Guest Ranch, which was located along Central Avenue, four miles north of Downtown. Within a year Saper was promoting the development of the Camelback Towers. The initial Camelback Towers project consisted of an 18-floor building with 200 apartments, estimated to cost about \$5,000,000. Saper hired architect Charles Polacek to create the initial plans for the high-rise, and in 1959 the City of Phoenix Planning Commission approved the project. Saper sought to acquire Federal Housing Administration (FHA)

funding under Section 213 of the National Housing Act to support the venture as a cooperatively owned development.



**APARTMENTS PLANNED** — Sketched above is the 18-story co-operative apartment building which Milton Saper proposes to erect on site of Toney Belle Guest Ranch, Central and Pierson. Charles Polacek has been retained as architect for the building, which would contain 200 units and cost an estimated \$5 million. Federal Housing Administration has approved the site, but issued no commitment for mortgage insurance under Section 213 of the national housing act. Saper reported a group of New York City investors is backing the project. For FHA financing, a large number of the apartments must be sold in advance of construction, it was stated. No detailed plans for the structure have been started so far.

Original design as sketched by Polacek, from the *Arizona Republic*, January 23, 1960, p.17.

Progress on the project halted with the passing of Saper's architect Charles Polacek in 1960 and changes with FHA laws, and the permit lapsed. Saper applied again for a 16-

story structure on September 12, 1961 and was denied by the Commission. On October 3, 1961 the Commission reconsidered Saper's request and, after learning of the reasons why the project was not initiated under the previously issued permit, approved the project. The approved 16-story residential tower also included a 17th story penthouse with outdoor lounge.

The Arizona First National Realty and Construction Company was incorporated in Arizona in 1962 to carry out the construction and management of the project, and Milton Saper was elected as executive vice president of the company. Saper continued to work towards finding FHA secured financing, but in August of 1962 an *Arizona Republic* article noted that the developer had failed to meet certain conditions of the FHA (Section 213) financing. As a result, Arizona First National Realty changed to an FHA backed loan for \$4,953,100 under Section 207 of the National Housing Act. This section specifically insured loans for the construction of rental housing with moderately priced leases. In this regard, rents were controlled by the FHA. In addition to dwelling units, Section 207 insured projects could include amenities and commercial facilities to serve the needs of the occupants.

Started by Polacek, plans for Camelback Towers were redesigned and completed by architect (Jacob) John Schotanus, Jr. (1911-1994) following Polacek's death. The steel-reinforced concrete building was designed in the Modern style. A building permit application and permit plans for construction on the 254-unit, Camelback Towers complex were filed on July 10, 1962. The first model apartment was opened on Saturday, March 16, 1963, while the project was still under construction. New tenants were able to move into apartments on the lower floors as early as September 1963. The official opening of Camelback Towers took place on February 2, 1964.

**Today's the BIG Day!**

It's Open House today at Camelback Towers . . . from 12 Noon to 5 P.M. We're celebrating the Towers' official completion—and you're invited! Souvenirs, gifts, refreshments, music, entertainment, guided tours of this fabulous 17-story apartment house complex—all are awaiting your arrival. No obligation; just bring a smile and friends!



Meet "Miss Arizona" . . . hear her present her famed ventriloquist act! See the Dick Smith Swim Gym champion divers in action! Come anytime; leave anytime.

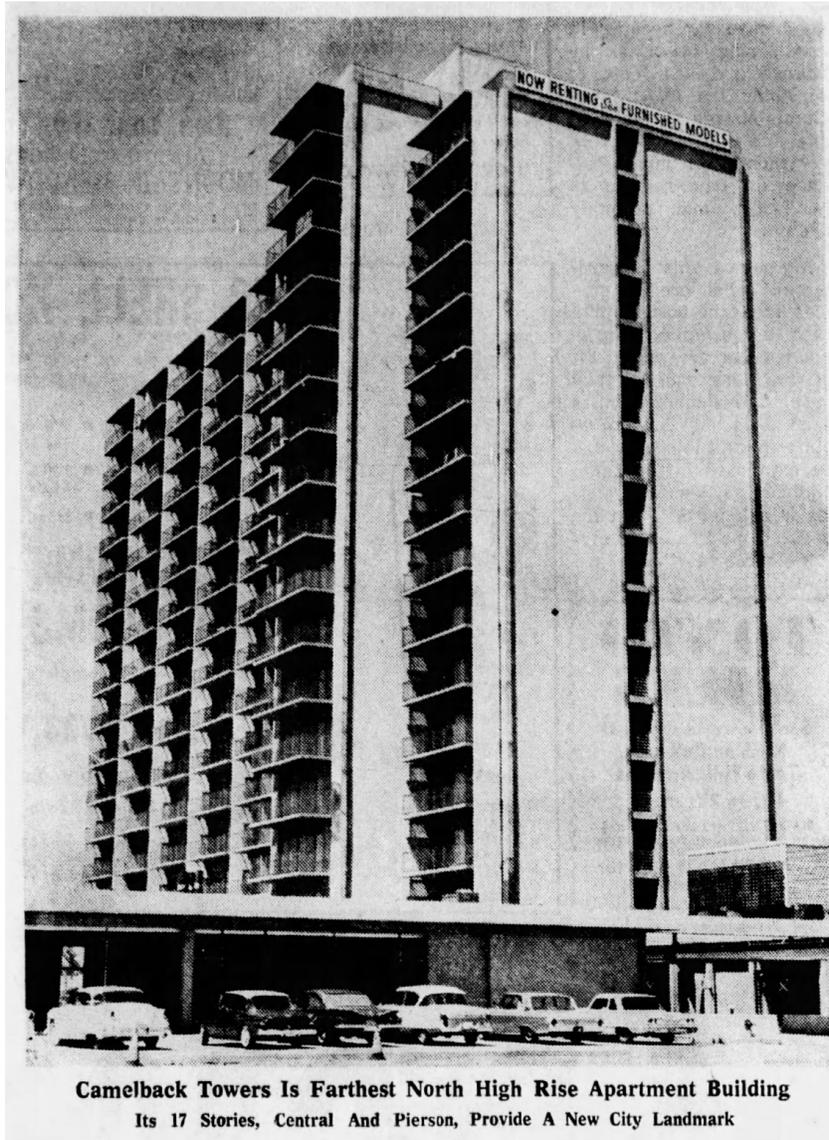
**Camelback  
TOWERS**

4750 N. CENTRAL  
Tel. 264-5919

Unfurnished one-bedroom suites from only \$169 monthly. Studio and two-bedroom suites also available . . . plus furnished apartments for winter rentals (TV included). **All rates include utilities!** Models open 9 A.M.-6 P.M.

An open house event held in celebration of Camelback Towers' completion, taken from the *Arizona Republic*, February 2, 1964.

The concept for Modern urban living included shared amenities, such as outdoor lounges and recreation areas and, in the case of Camelback Towers, supportive commercial space with retail and medical offices. Within a vastly single-family, suburban setting, Camelback Towers reflected changing interests in the new lifestyle concept for the modern community. Once completed, the "luxury" high-rise amenities offered at Camelback Towers included a penthouse lounge and sun deck, a 3-level underground 254-space garage with parking attendants at the first level, laundry facilities on the penthouse and basement floors, a roughly 4,000 square foot detached recreational building and a swimming pool.



From Central Avenue, facing the storefronts with the residential building in view behind, from the *Arizona Republic*, September 16, 1963.

The one-story commercial buildings located east of the residential tower were referred to as the “skirt,” which flanked the concourse leading to the main tower entrance. At the original time of opening in January of 1964, one of the two commercial buildings was described as a “medical wing” with a pharmacy, optometrist and a dentist office. Beauty and barber shops, and a coffee shop, among other businesses, filled the other commercial building. As a part of the modern, “luxury” lifestyle package promoted for the Towers, these shops provided convenient amenities and services to the apartment dwellers at the complex.

In 2004 Crown Pacific Properties acquired the property and completed an interior remodel of the apartments and recreation center and rebranded the property as Landmark Towers.

In 2005, Crown Pacific began the process of reclassifying the property as a condominium, individual units were sold to owners and the Landmark Towers Condominium Association was formed. The original residential tower, commercial buildings, recreation building, and swimming pool remain intact on the property and are subject to Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&R's) of the condominium association.

### **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

The eligibility criteria for HP overlay zoning and listing on the PHPR are set forth in Section 807.D of the City of Phoenix Zoning Ordinance. To qualify, a property must demonstrate significance in local, regional, state, or national history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture, according to one or more of the following criteria:

- A. The property is associated with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history;
- B. The property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- C. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represents the work of a master, possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. The property has yielded or may likely yield information integral to the understanding of our prehistory or history.

In addition to the significance requirement, the property must also be at least 50 years old or have achieved significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance. The property must also possess sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey its significance.

### **EVALUATION**

The property meets the age requirement, having been constructed in 1963. The property also meets the significance requirement under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development for its association with the brief development of "luxury" high-rise residential buildings in the Phoenix midtown corridor from 1957 to 1966. Camelback Towers was the first of these high-rise residential developments to include commercial buildings at the complex, expanding amenities and convenience for residents beyond pools and recreation halls. Camelback Towers is also recommended eligible for the Phoenix Historic Property Register under Criterion C as an example of a midcentury Modern high-rise residential building. The concentration of taller 1960s era buildings extending north along Central Avenue from the downtown urban core is still a prevailing characteristic of the Phoenix skyline.

Camelback Towers meets the minimum requirements for historic integrity with most of its original design, setting, materials, and workmanship intact. There have been some repairs and replacements of decorative details and the installation of a steel canopy between the

two commercial buildings, which is potentially reversible, but the property continues its residential and commercial association and still communicates the feeling of a midcentury residential high-rise development.

### **BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

Section 807.E states that, when applying the evaluation criteria in Section 807.D, the boundaries of a historic district should be drawn as carefully as possible to ensure that:

1. The district contains documented historic, architectural, archaeological or natural resources;
2. The district boundaries coincide with documented historic boundaries such as early roadways, canals, subdivision plats or property lines;
3. Other district boundaries coincide with logical physical or manmade features and reflect recognized neighborhood or area boundaries; and
4. Other non-historic resources or vacant land is included where necessary to create appropriate boundaries to assist in meeting the criteria in Section 807.D.

The proposed HP zoning boundary encompasses 3.09 gross acres and includes the entire condominium complex, as well as the adjacent right of way, which is customary for rezoning cases. It coincides with documented historic boundaries and follows parcel lines and street monument lines.

### **CONCLUSION**

The rezoning request Z-7-21-4 to establish Historic Preservation (HP) overlay zoning for the subject property should be approved for the following reasons:

1. The property meets the significance, age, and integrity requirements for HP overlay zoning set forth in Section 807.D of the Zoning Ordinance; and
2. The proposed boundaries meet the eligibility criteria outlined in Section 807.E.

#### Writer

H. Ruter

3/18/2021

#### Team Leader

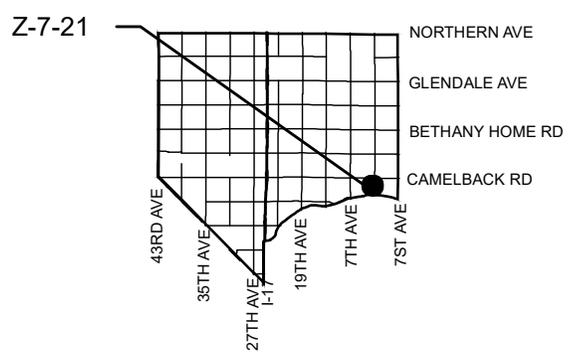
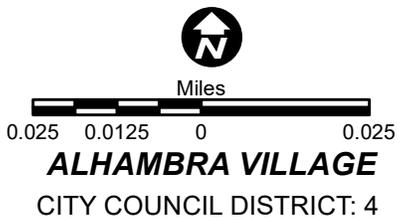
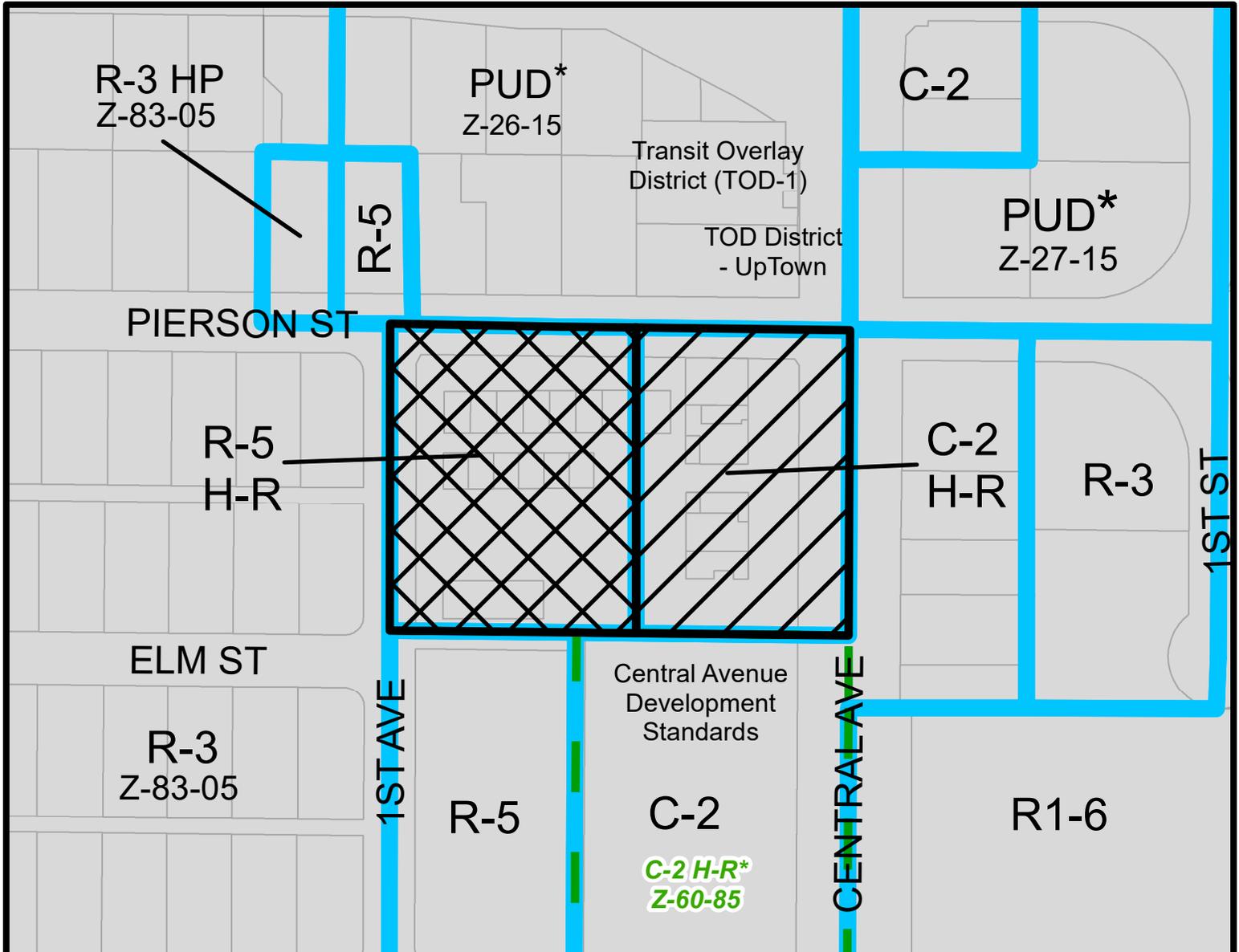
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#### Attachments:

Sketch Map (1 page)

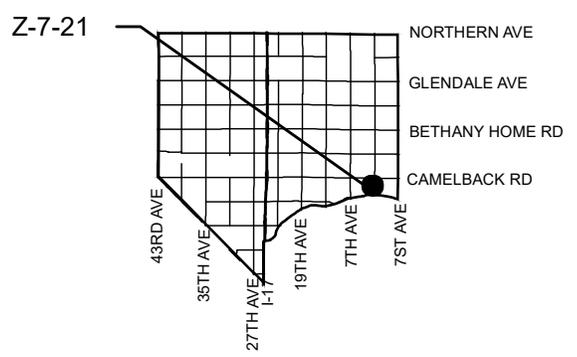
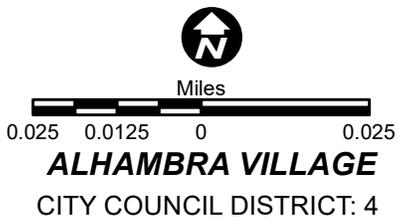
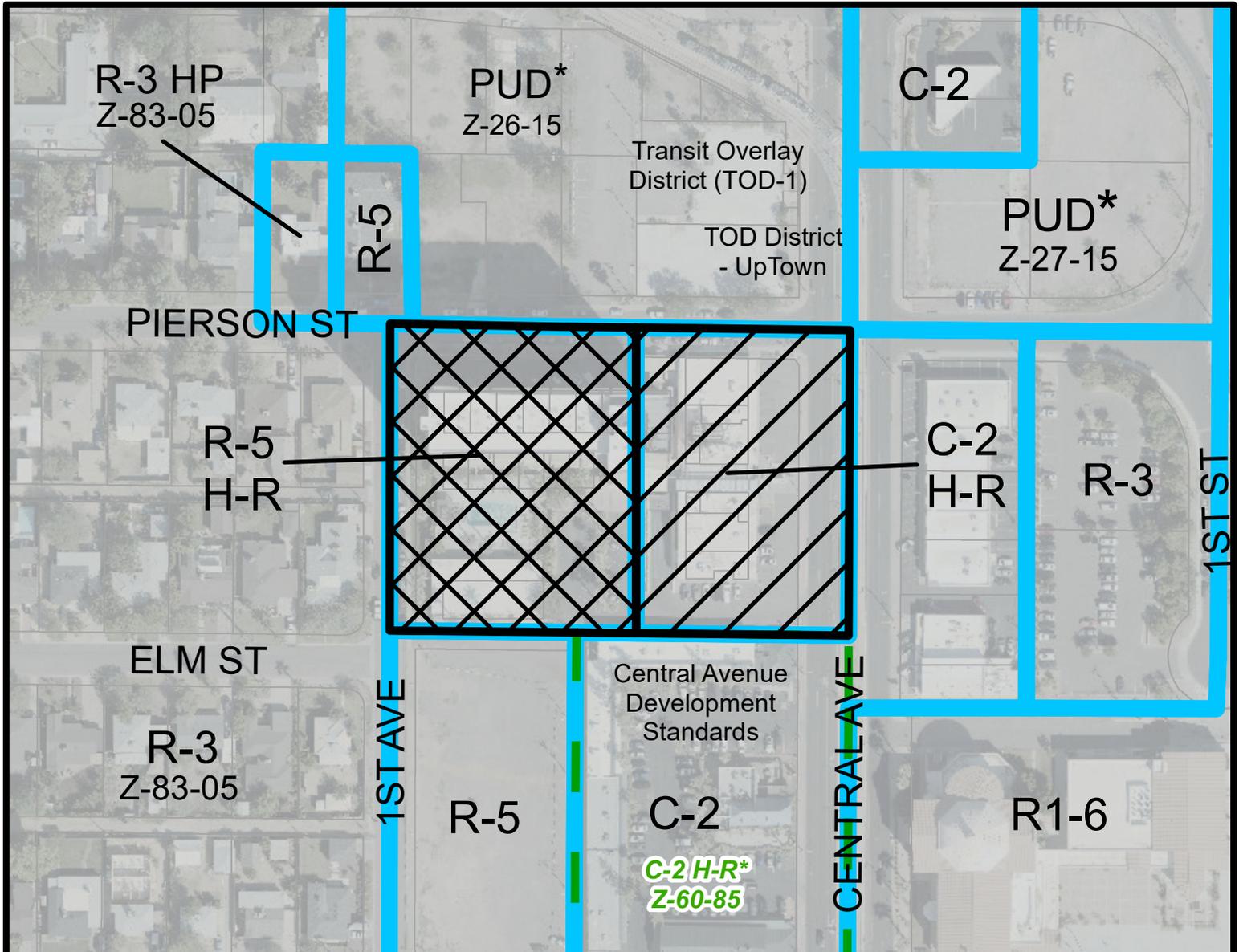
Aerials (2 pages)

Photos (3 pages)

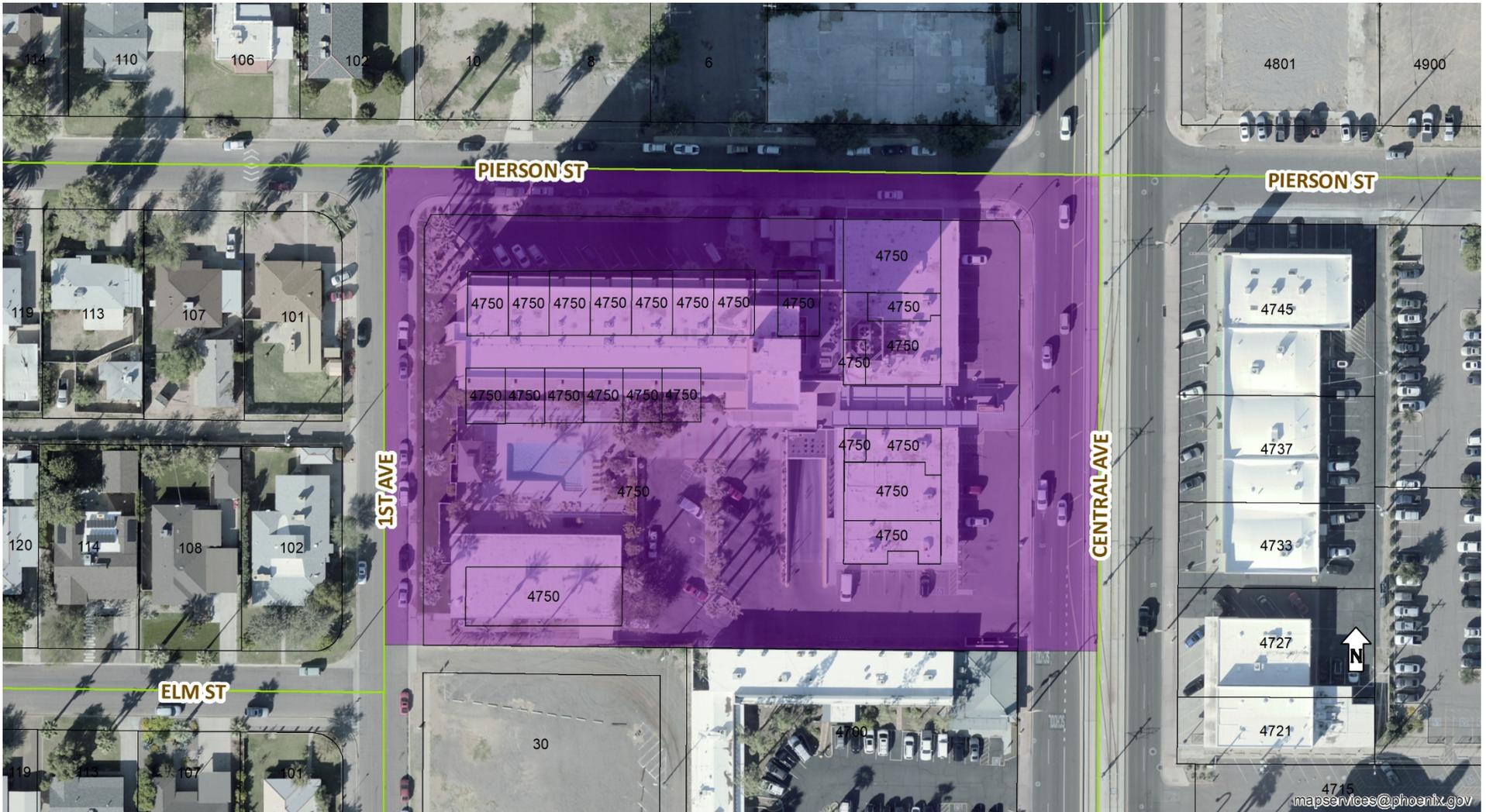


<b>APPLICANT'S NAME:</b> City of Phoenix Hist Pres Commission		<b>REQUESTED CHANGE:</b> FROM: C-2 H-R TOD-1 ( 1.43 a.c.) R-5 H-R TOD-1 ( 1.66 a.c.)	
<b>APPLICATION NO.</b> Z-7-21	<b>DATE:</b> 2/2/2021 <b>REVISION DATES:</b>	TO: C-2 H-R HP TOD-1 ( 1.43 a.c.) R-5 H-R HP TOD-1 ( 1.66 a.c.)	
GROSS AREA INCLUDING 1/2 STREET AND ALLEY DEDICATION IS APPROX. <b>3.09 Acres</b>	<b>AERIAL PHOTO &amp; QUARTER SEC. NO.</b> QS 18-27	<b>ZONING MAP</b> H-8	
<b>MULTIPLES PERMITTED</b> C-2 H-R TOD-1, R-5 H-R TOD-1 C-2 H-R HP TOD-1, R-5 H-R HP TOD-1	<b>CONVENTIONAL OPTION</b> 207, 241 207, 241	<b>* UNITS P.R.D. OPTION</b> 25, 86 25, 86	

\* Maximum Units Allowed with P.R.D. Bonus



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## Camelback Towers (a.k.a. Landmark Towers) 4750 North Central Avenue

Proposed Historic Preservation (HP) Zoning Overlay shown in purple

Z-7-21-4  
4750 North Central Avenue  
Camelback Towers (now Landmark Towers)



Eastern/southern façade of tower with commercial storefronts, facing northwest. Scaffolding for repair project visible, March 2021



Commercial storefronts, facing west/northwest, March 2021

Z-7-21-4  
4750 North Central Avenue  
Camelback Towers (now Landmark Towers)



Southern façade and recreation building, facing north/northeast, March 2021



Recreation building, facing northeast, March 2021

Z-7-21-4  
4750 North Central Avenue  
Camelback Towers (now Landmark Towers)



Northern façade of tower, facing south, March 2021