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Buckeye's Douglas Ranch looks to expand

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When Tom Hennessy tries to explain his Douglas Ranch project, he has to divide it into sections.

That's because it is difficult to wrap people's minds around the massive Buckeye development. Hennessy calls it Arizona's largest master-planned community, larger than Tempe, and predicts it will take 25 to 50 years to complete.

Now, the community could get larger.

Planners of Douglas Ranch are working with town officials to increase residential units and commercial space. Douglas Ranch, 25 miles northeast of downtown Buckeye, west of the White Tank Mountains, was originally approved for about 83,000 homes and 25 million square feet of commercial, office and industrial space.

Now the developers are aiming for about 100,000 homes and 50 million square feet of commercial, office and industrial space. They plan to bring the proposed increases before the Town Council for approval in late April.

The change would bring Douglas Ranch's projected residential count to 250,000 to 300,000 residents, and could generate about 160,000 jobs.

"We are trying to create a job-based community with about 1.6 jobs per households," said Hennessy, general manager of Douglas Ranch. "That's the main driver of why we are increasing. We want to make sure we have enough office, commercial and industrial space to make a vibrant community. Usually residential comes first, but we are going to make a strong effort to capture businesses at a community and national level."

Building isn't scheduled to begin until 2009, so developers are still in the design and planning stages.

El Dorado Holdings and JDMD Investments are the principal owners of Douglas

Ranch.

Hennessy, who works for El Dorado, plans to team with local universities and other community experts to troubleshoot ideas for the project. He hopes their expertise can help developers find the best sustainability methods.

Douglas Ranch developers plan to make room for a university within the project, which could be a first for the town. The community also is scheduled to have about 12 high schools and 25 elementary schools.

"Everyone realizes there is real opportunity here," Hennessy said. "We have a unique circumstance. We have a Valley that's growing. They say we will double in population. We have to look at how we can do it better with an eye toward the future."

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