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Business park may attract 20,000 E.V. jobs

By Misty Williams
Tribune

Plans to build a massive business park along Power Road in Gilbert's Morrison Ranch master-planned community could bring more than 20,000 jobs to the area. A majority of the \$2 billion project would sit between Elliot and Warner roads, with a portion also located in Mesa.

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The business park will be an integral part of Morrison Ranch, which will someday include close to 7,000 homes, Scott Morrison said.

Longtime farmers in the area, Morrison's family is developing 2,400 acres of land.

The family's vision has always been to wrap together home, work and recreation, he said.

"Clearly the business park is going to be a big leap forward in the chance to make that happen," Morrison said.

Community trails and neighborhood roads will connect to the park, allowing employees to bike to work without having to ride on busy arterial streets.

Those paths will lead to some 8.2 million square feet of commercial space, blending high-end offices, corporate campuses, a hotel, restaurants, industrial space and other uses. Construction is expected to begin next summer and take roughly 15 years to complete.

As commutes get longer for Valley workers, the need for more regional employment centers will grow, said commercial developer Allan Lunsford, president of the Irvine-based Lunsford Group.

Lunsford is partnering with another Southern California company, Birtcher Development and Investments, to develop the project.

Morrison Ranch Business Park is positioned to be in the middle of the East Valley's growth and could have as many as 24,000 workers, he said.

"This is really a relationship with the Morrison family," Lunsford said. "We want to be part of their story. We don't want to detract from it."

The site's location near the U.S. 60 and Loop 202, as well as Williams Gateway Airport, will make it appealing to employers, said Brandon Birtcher, president of Birtcher Development. The East Valley also has a rich labor base, he said. "They're well educated. They've been well trained. They're capable of making the commitment to hard work," Birtcher said.

The Morrison business park will be a huge employment center, Gilbert business development specialist Kelly Patton said.

"That's our main goal here: to create some of those employment centers, so people don't have to go to downtown Phoenix or Chandler or downtown Mesa to go to work," she said.