

Council approves state's largest mall

PATRICK ROLAND TODAY STAFF

A retail development three times the size of any mall project in Arizona is in line to be one of the top attractions in the Northwest Valley.

Surprise City Council members Thursday unanimously agreed to move toward a development agreement with Westcor to commercially develop Prasada, a 4,200-acre project with 1,200 acres of retail space, including an auto mall, a shopping center and big box retailers.

The project also proposes construction of a hospital, medical offices, townhomes, condominiums and a separate residential area to be developed by Fulton Homes.

Some of the larger retailers could open their doors as early as 2008, with the mall to follow over the next five to 10 years, Westcor officials said.

Infrastructure, including more than 20 miles of road, waterlines and other utilities, needs to be placed before major development can occur. Westcor officials said that ground will be broken on the infrastructure this year.

Westcor will be responsible for paying the costs of the infrastructure work on the project. They are likely to be reimbursed by the city through a sales-tax percentage deal that will be negotiated at the Feb. 22 council meeting.

The privately owned land is undeveloped, said Westcor assistant vice president of development and marketing Karen Maurer, but infrastructure work could begin as early as March if negotiations with the city scheduled to continue at the Feb. 22 City Council meeting go as planned.

"This is a blank slate," Maurer said. "This is the largest project we've ever done. It's an incredibly large undertaking."

Maurer said the project could generate as many as 20,000 jobs in the city. Although the financial impact has not been determined, the project will bring "hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars" to the city's tax base, she said.

"It's nothing less than staggering," Westcor Principal Jack Razor told the council. "We typically become the largest taxpayer in town."

Maurer said the name Prasada stems from a Sanskrit phrase that translates to grace and serenity. The project will feature "water-guiding principles" to create movement throughout the development.

"When you drive in to Prasada, you'll know where you've arrived," Maurer said. "It's not just a mall; it's part of an overall global picture."

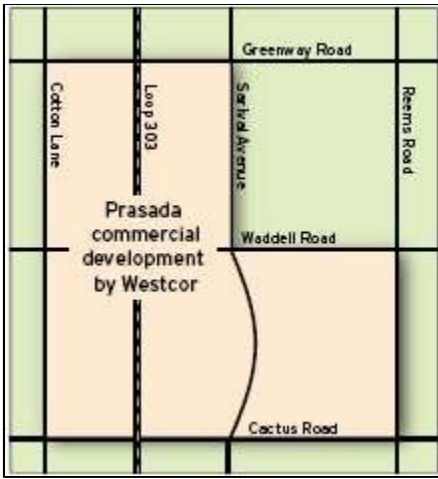
No tenants have been announced, but Maurer said Dillard's and Harkins Theatres have already expressed interest. Major announcements about tenants are expected in the next few weeks, she said.

The developer and the city have been working on the project since 2002.

City Manager Jim Rumpeltes told the council landing a shopping center of Prasada's caliber was an amazing achievement for the growing city.

"This project is like a three-legged stool," Rumpeltes said. "It's commercial, it's residential and it will generate employment. It provides a quality economic engine for the future of Surprise and in the long term, it provides a good employment base so that people who live in Surprise can work here, too."

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