

## Arizona Republic

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### DESERT RIDGE DEVELOPMENT BARELY STARTING

*Michael Clancy, The Arizona Republic*

By one measure, the Desert Ridge area of northeast Phoenix is almost finished.

More than 90 percent of the available land has been sold to developers, much of it at record-breaking prices.

But in some ways, the master-planned community has barely gotten started, even though the first land transactions in the area took place 14 years ago.

Consider: Less than 20 percent of the expected housing in the area has been built, despite it being in private hands.

So what's behind the delay?

Officials say there are many factors.

Certainly, money is part of the equation. The land prices, which topped last week's sale of 269 acres west of Desert Ridge Marketplace for almost \$150 million, are just part of the cost. But the ongoing housing slump and a lack of infrastructure add to the delay, as well.

"It all should be solid from Phoenix to Scottsdale sooner than you think," said David Richert, senior executive assistant to the city manager.

Last week's land sale leaves just three parcels remaining in the area.

\* One parcel contains a little more than 25 acres, zoned for high-density residential. It is scheduled for auction at the end of May and has an appraised value of \$20.5 million.

\* Another parcel wraps around the northern and eastern sides of the Wildfire Golf Club courses. That parcel has 200 acres and is zoned residential. A sale isn't scheduled.

\* Also not scheduled for sale is a 265-acre parcel at Pinnacle Peak Road and 56th Street that is zoned for residential. Neither of the larger parcels has had a price put on it yet.

Those parcels make up the last 9 percent of developable land in the area. The master plan calls for up to 18,000 homes and 50,000 residents, and it could take 10 years to complete.

The buyer, Rightpath Limited, said it expects to complete its development of 3,700 homes, most of them condos, townhouses and apartments, in three to five years.

Other large developments in Desert Ridge appear to be on that kind of schedule. CityNorth, being developed by the Thomas J. Klutznick Co., was announced in January 2005. Only now has work started. The project, assuming it stays on schedule, will be finished by late 2009.

Large parcels farther east, owned by Meritage Homes, Pulte Homes and Toll Brothers Builders, are in the works, but no soil has been turned yet.

David Richert, senior executive assistant to the Phoenix city manager, said a large waterline being built from Cave Creek Road east into Desert Ridge will play a big part in the timing of those developments. It could take four years to finish, he said.

But not everyone is happy about what lies ahead.

Nick Meris, a homeowner in the area, said he is starting to feel the pinch of more people.

"We moved here 10 years ago. What a great move it was, getting out of the hubbub of the city. We were happy when the stores finally came. Now, we are wondering if we need to move on again."

A version of this story may have appeared in your community Republic.

CAPTION: Record price

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