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Forum outlines large-scale developments for Gilbert

by **Parker Leavitt** - Nov. 21, 2009 08:00 AM

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For more than a decade, Gilbert has been best-known nationally for its explosive population growth, more than tripling in size since 1995.

Now, town officials are more focused on attracting greater employment opportunities to encourage residents to "live, play and work" within Gilbert.

At an economic forum held last month, Mayor John Lewis, town staff and several developers outlined their vision for Gilbert's future, which included several large-scale developments scattered across the town's 11 "employment corridors."

Some of these commercial and mixed-use projects are already under construction. Others are moving through the final planning stages, and a few could take 15 to 20 years to materialize.

Eventually, town officials estimate these developments could bring \$500 billion in total economic impact to Gilbert.

Here's a look at those projects.

Rivulon by Nationwide

THE PROJECT: Nationwide Realty Investors, which also owns the Gainey Ranch Corporate Center in Scottsdale, envisions a large mixed-use development for its site near Gilbert Road and the Santan Freeway.

The Columbus, Ohio-based developer plans to build up to 5 million square feet of office and retail space, two hotels and a residential community on the 250-acre site.

THE VISION: "We see this as a sustainable development that will provide attractive employment to the nearby workforce and really enhance quality of life by minimizing commute times," said Chris Thompson, Nationwide director of real estate equities.

REALITY CHECK: The project, however, is contingent upon market demand and could take 15 years to be completed.

The Rockefeller Group

THE PROJECT: The Rockefeller Group, founded in 1928 by John D. Rockefeller, plans to develop two large parcel in Gilbert.

THE VISION: The Manhattan-based company wants to build an industry and business park on 156 acres near Warner and Recker roads. The site would also include about 25 acres of multi-family housing - most likely apartments or condos.

REALITY CHECK: A rezoning proposal was recently accepted by the town Planning Commission and will be heard by the Town Council at an upcoming meeting.

The Rockefeller Group has also acquired 44 acres near Germann and Lindsay roads for a proposed Gilbert Crossroads Business Center, which would include about 500,000 square feet of office space.

Circle G Development

THE PROJECT: Most of this 600-acre project has already been built, including the Gilbert Gateway Towne Center anchored by Walmart and Target near Power and Ray roads.

THE VISION: Circle G plans to build a corporate center, a medical office plaza and an industrial building on 100 acres of its remaining land. **Once completed, Barney expects the corporate center and industrial park could employ up to 1,500 workers.**

REALITY CHECK: An additional 100,000-square-foot industrial building was built last November and is now 100 percent leased, developer Jason Barney said.

Morrison Ranch

THE PROJECT: The Morrison Ranch area spans 3,000 acres in Gilbert and Mesa, and much of the residential space has already been developed. The next phase of the project will include a total of 400 acres for commercial office space near Power and Elliot roads.

THE VISION: Planners hope the Morrison Ranch Business Center will eventually include high-end employers in research, biotechnology, accounting and other high-paying fields. The complex will surround open green spaces and maintain Gilbert's agricultural atmosphere, Morrison Ranch partner Scott Morrison said.

REALITY CHECK: A start date for the development has not yet been announced, but Morrison said it will "easily be a 20-year project."

Mercy Gilbert Medical Center

THE PROJECT: The area surrounding Mercy Gilbert Medical Center continues to attract new health-care companies to the southeast Valley.

THE VISION: The Celebration Stem Cell Centre, expected to open in January, will process and store millions of stem cells drawn from umbilical-cord blood.

Clients can pay the blood bank to store the cells for later use, and donated stem cells could be used for clinical trials and treatment at Mercy Gilbert's Cardiovascular Research Center and other institutions.

REALITY CHECK: The Barrow Neurological Institute also plans to open up an office at Mercy Gilbert within the next year, according to Catholic Healthcare West spokesman Paul Szablowski. Since opening in 2006, the hospital itself has expanded to include over 1,000 employees, including about 670 physicians.

Banner Gateway Medical Center

THE PROJECT: Houston-based M.D. Anderson, a cancer research and treatment organization affiliated with the University of Texas, recently announced it will open a \$90-million satellite facility on the Banner Gateway campus.

THE VISION: The M.D. Anderson Banner Cancer Center will focus on breast, lung, prostate, and gastrointestinal cancers, as well as melanoma and "liquid cancers" such as leukemia.

REALITY CHECK: Builders expect to break ground on the 120,000-square-foot, 3-story building later this year, with a target opening date in September 2011.

Cooley Station

THE PROJECT: A 700-acre area surrounding Williams Field and Recker roads, the Cooley Station project has been in the planning stages for about 15 years.

THE VISION: It could someday be home to 24,000 new residents, a dense village core and commercial office space.

REALITY CHECK: Construction on two subdivisions began in 2006, but the project's signature site - the urban village - has been held up as developers wait for shovel-ready sites. Improvements to the sites are currently underway, and every parcel should be shovel-ready within months, spokesman Nathan Cooley said.

Northwest Gilbert

THE PROJECT: Near Gilbert's border with Mesa and Chandler lies the town's "Fortune Corridor," where Fortune 100 companies Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics both maintain offices. Spanish insurance giant MAPFRE also recently opened its first Arizona branch in the area near Baseline Road and Fiesta Boulevard.

THE VISION: With a well-educated work force of 235,000 people living within a 30-minute commute, Gilbert officials believe they can attract more high-tech companies to the area.

Nearly 35 percent of Gilbert residents have a college degree, compared to about 27 percent nationally, according to U.S. Census statistics.

REALITY CHECK: Lockheed Martin relocated a weapons systems repair facility, which employs about 40 people, from Mesa to Gilbert in July 2008. General Dynamics Advanced Information Systems employs about 600 people at its Gilbert office, which has built satellites for organizations such as the U.S. Department of Defense and NASA.

MAPFRE and two of its affiliates have more than 100 employees at the 58,000-square-foot office.

Knowledge-Power-Gateway Corridor

THE PROJECT: This corridor takes its name from both the location of several institutions of higher learning along or near Power Road, including Arizona State University at the Polytechnic, as well as Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport. Although the airport is located in Mesa, town officials recognize the tremendous economic impact the airport has on Gilbert. Moreover, some of the airport's immediate development area is located in Gilbert as well as Queen Creek.

THE VISION: The East Valley Partnership three years ago collaborated with the Urban Land Institute to set out a vision for converting the airport and a 52-square-square mile area around it into an industrial-commercial-residential center where thousands of people who live, work and play. Over a 25-year span, that plan envisioned 1,575 acres of industrial land, 400 acres of office space, 500 acres for retail, and 11,000 acres for developing 60,000 single-family and condo/apartment units. The plan also looked at the airport itself as not only becoming an increasing important satellite for Sky Harbor, but also a major cargo hub that would lure freight now being moved by truck from Los Angeles' airport to the Southwest.

REALITY CHECK: More than 40 companies do business on or around the airport site, including Boeing, Cessna, Hawker Beechcraft and Allegiant Air, said Lynn Kusy, airport executive director. In September, the Federal Aviation Administration awarded \$8.9 million to the airport for a terminal-expansion project. The expansion will double the size of the terminal and bring the airport's annual passenger capacity to nearly 1 million people. Construction in the terminal is expected to conclude late next year.

Since 1999, the airport has received more than \$100 million in private investment, over \$60 million from local governments and more than \$100 million from the FAA, Kusy said.

The proposed Gaylord hotel-resort could further stimulate the overall airport area plan, though the recession has forced developers to postpone construction at least temporarily.

<http://www.azcentral.com/community/gilbert/articles/2009/11/20/20091120gr-econprojects1121.html>