

## Hotel planned near airport in Mesa

### Visitor bureau to monitor development of Gateway area to ensure standards

by **Gary Nelson** - Aug. 8, 2008 12:00 AM

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Passengers have been coming and going from Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport for a couple of years now, but they have nowhere in the immediate neighborhood to lay their heads.

That's unlike most passenger airports, where hotels sprout like mushrooms to shelter the traveling masses.

Now the first hotel planned for the airport's doorstep is on the books.

A four-story, 95-room Comfort Suites property is expected to be the cornerstone of a project called the Commons Lifestyle Center, which also will include offices, restaurants and shopping on the southeastern corner of Elliot and Power roads.

"This is really the first serious hotel development that's been planned and gone through the whole development process," said Scot Rigby, a Mesa development official who oversees the city's efforts to guide growth in the Gateway area.

"Everyone that flies in or out, we'd like to have the opportunity for them to stay in Mesa," Rigby said. "That hasn't been something that's occurred in the past."

The project won approval this month from the Planning and Zoning Board. The City Council will take it up after its summer break.

It's the brainchild of George Gilbert, a Scottsdale developer who was praised by Rigby and by Robert Brinton, president of Mesa's Convention and Visitors Bureau, for holding to Mesa's standards for the Gateway area.

"The developer has been great to work with as far as making a plan that functions and meets our concerns about this urban, mixed-use environment," Rigby said.

Brinton said his group endorsed the project despite some initial concerns. "At first we did not agree to support this," Brinton said. "But they came back and agreed to do what we asked them to do."

"We wanted to make sure we have a minimum standard," Brinton said. "This hotel met the minimum standard."

Brinton cited John Kasarda, an internationally known expert on airport development who visited Mesa last year and warned that poor-quality projects could doom the Gateway area to mediocrity.

"There's going to be a lot of projects around the airport that want to come in, and they can really affect you for the positive or the negative," Brinton said.

In this case, Brinton is still worried that at 95 rooms, the hotel might be too small for the owners to justify retaining an on-site sales manager, a position that would ensure steady bookings and revenue.

"Typically, properties of that size and brand don't have sales managers," Brinton said.

He also said his group will monitor the project's progress through Mesa's bureaucracy, especially the design-review process, to ensure that the hotel has an adequate lobby and landscaping.

Brinton said that, given the slow economy and the staging of the Commons project, the hotel might not open until 2010.

In the meantime, he said, he expects numerous other announcements of lodging projects in the Gateway area.

DMB Associates of Scottsdale, which now owns a big chunk of the General Motors Desert Proving Ground property, has said major resort components will be among the earliest phases of its development there.