

LDS complex planned for 21 acres in Gilbert

Blake Herzog, Tribune

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Plans for an LDS temple that would be about the same height as the Hayden Flour Mill silos in Tempe are beginning to take shape in Gilbert.

Zoning approval for the site is expected to go to the town Planning Commission in September. Also next month, architectural drawings will be submitted to the Design Review Board.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is preparing to build two temples in the Valley, one in Gilbert and the other in Phoenix. They are expected to relieve overcrowding at the 82-year-old Mesa temple, said Paul Gilbert, an attorney representing the Gilbert project.

"We are running that temple very early and very late" in order to accommodate demand, Gilbert said Thursday.

Plans call for the Gilbert temple to be built on 21 acres at the southeast corner of Greenfield and Pecos roads. Temples are reserved by the LDS church for marriages, baptisms and other ceremonies and are open only to members in good standing.

A meeting house, similar to the other LDS wards found throughout Gilbert, will be built farther east on the property.

Property owner LeSueur Investments LLC is seeking a zoning change, minor General Plan amendment and a use permit for the project. The requests were discussed at a Planning Commission study session Wednesday. They are expected to go to a vote at the commission's Sept. 2 meeting. A use permit is required for any religious facility covering more than 10 acres within a commercial zone.

Gilbert said at the meeting he is seeking a commercial zoning and General Plan designation, rather than public institutional categories usually used for houses of worship.

"It is not a public building," he said. "What goes on inside that building is very private, very sacred to this group of people."

Gilbert was able to provide a few more details about the temple Thursday. Construction will begin in about a year and cover approximately 18,200 square feet of land. It will be two or three stories high, so the building's square footage will be larger than the land's.

The grounds will be extensively landscaped, and the church will pay the costs of burying power lines, which run along both Pecos and Greenfield. Gilbert said the design has not been finalized, though there may be similarities to a temple opened earlier this year in Draper, Utah.

"This temple is going to be a very unique temple. It won't follow the typical pattern that has been used for many of the other temples. This is designed to be a very special temple, and therefore it's taking longer to do the details," Gilbert said.

The church is seeking some exemptions from typical building standards, partly to allow the temple building to be 85 feet high and the steeple to rise another 95 feet above that. The 180-foot total is about the same height of the silos at Tempe's Hayden Flour Mill. They stand 186 feet tall.

The meeting house will be below 85 feet, and an accessory building and parking lot will be shared by the temple and meeting house.

A roundabout is being proposed for an intersection of two collector streets that would serve the south side of the property. Town planner Amy Temes told the commission the alternative type of intersection, which has made some inroads into other parts of the Valley, is still being discussed.

Most of the commission appeared receptive to the plans, and member Chad Fuller praised the church's willingness to foot the bill for burying the power lines.

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