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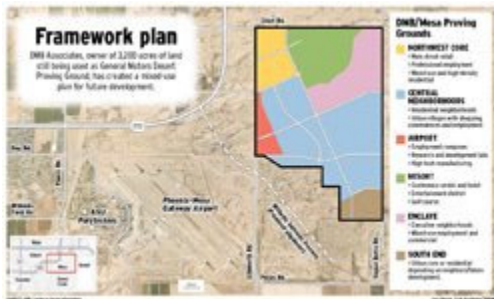
## 'Desert urbanism' proposed for former GM site

Sonu Munshi, Tribune

Dense, urban spaces, narrow pedestrian pathways to a nearby coffee shop or bookstore, a short drive to work. That's the kind of urbanism southeast Mesa can expect in the future, if things go as planned by the developer of 3,200 acres of property.

Scottsdale-based developer DMB Associates has been talking for months about opting for mixed-use, planned community district zoning for the property it bought from General Motors two years ago for \$265 million.

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Now, it has a more concrete plan to create that urban space in the desert - outlined recently to the planning and zoning board, as part of a major general plan amendment and rezoning request.

"We're hoping to hit the sweet spot where we embrace the 21st-century dynamic nature with something significantly urban," said Grady Gammage Jr., zoning attorney for DMB's Mesa Proving Grounds.

To embrace its moniker of "21st-century desert urbanism," DMB would like a flexible framework to work with, one that develops as the market dictates over the years.

Under this new type of planned district, which Mesa approved last September, a developer gets to create a zoning ordinance for a property and is able to get some flexibility in future development.

DMB hopes to have the City Council vote on an area's general character in terms of character and intensity, but be allowed to have decisions on exact land use. City officials are currently considering checks and balances on this kind of planning.

Mesa is simultaneously introducing form-based zoning, which will be required to guide development in such a master-planned community. It's a first for the city.

For instance, DMB has designated an area "open space" for parks.

A "village" land use group will primarily include single-family houses or attached town houses with a limit of up to three-story condominium-type uses. But that could also mesh with small neighborhood retail, like a convenience store.

A denser category would be "general urban" space, which could go up to seven stories.

But what has drawn the most attention is an urban core on the southeast corner of Elliot and Ellsworth roads, as the most dense.

Other plans include intimate neighborhoods with narrower and a greater number of streets than usual in Mesa, in an attempt to bring pedestrians back to the area.

"We want more pedestrian users to walk on the streets, instead of having to drive a mile and a half to get to the nearest shopping center," Gammage said.

Planners have tilted the street grid off of the traditional linear north-south and east-west plank for both ecological and aesthetic reasons.

"It's for better solar orientation and also, people should feel, 'Oh, something's changed, something's different here,'" Gammage said.

Each neighborhood would have smaller community pocket parks, lending each a distinct identity.

DMB has also stipulated specific signage, parking and lighting standards into its plans in an effort to step up from the "same old, same old," Gammage noted.

Infrastructure plans for water, sewer and drainage have also been submitted to the city.

The aim is to attract a young, urban, highly educated demographic and corporate executive types who seek a vibrant lifestyle, the company said.

The DMB property, along with the neighboring 1,800 acres owned by Pacific Proving LLC, is generating significant attention among city leaders and visionaries.

The area is seen as the next big economic development driver, with its proximity to highways, not to mention Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport.

"But in order to get high-wage, high-density jobs, you need to figure out where will the executives and knowledge workers want to live when you bring those jobs," Gammage said.

For now, General Motors is still using the dirt and test tracks on the property for its vehicles.

GM is expected to vacate next summer. DMB will then start replacing the expanse of track and a smattering of aging brown buildings bounded by Elliot, Ellsworth, Signal Butte and Ray roads.

A five-mile circular test track overlooking the Superstition Mountains could become anything from a resort, a retail complex or condominiums.

DMB has already generated interest from resort and convention developers, said John Bradley, vice president and general manager of the DMB Mesa Proving Grounds.

A golf course and retail complexes are also likely to come up early on, "with a different presentation of retail."

Employment buildings and some residential will evolve over time, Bradley said.

Company representatives also threw in a word of caution to temper expectations, especially for the urban core on the southeast corner of Elliot and Ellsworth roads.

"One of our concerns is, when we talk about urban core, people think 'Oh, there'll be five 20-story buildings out there next year.' Mmm ... it takes a while," Gammage said.

The city has challenged us and we've challenged the city, Bradley added.

"We've created expectations that are really, really high, but we think we can exceed those expectations," he said.

But for a project as big as this, some concerns have been brought to the city's attention over the last few months.

In a letter to the city dated June 24, Gateway airport director Lynn Kusy said that while DMB contended that the proposed 15,000 high-density housing will not affect the future growth of the airport, "there is no way to assure high-density residences will not generate noise or over-flight complaints from the people who live there."

Boeing Co. has also expressed similar concerns.

Neighboring Queen Creek's planning commission, while approving the project, has pointed out that given population projections, the developers would need to work with the Queen Creek Unified School District "to provide future schools."

Mesa also received a letter in May from the Arizona Department of Transportation, which noted that the project is within the study corridor for the future state Route 802 freeway and that "ADOT does reserve the right to review and comment on all development plans for the site as to any impact they may have on the State Highway System."

For now, Mesa's planning board will meet again Aug. 21 for a second public hearing.

The city is also considering a similar general plan amendment request from Pacific Proving LLC, which owns the other 1,800 acres of the proving ground.

Following that, a joint planning board and City Council meeting could take place in early September, before the council makes a final decision on the zoning and annexation requests.