

MEETING MINUTES

City of Mesa
Downtown Vision Committee
Visit Mesa Conference Room
102 N. Center Street
Mesa, AZ 85201

Date: December 16, 2014 **Time:** 3:17 P.M.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Jo Wilson, Chair
Marco Meraz
Charles Huellmantel
Steve Chucri
Debby Elliott

MEMBERS ABSENT

Lorenzo Perez
Rich Marchant

STAFF PRESENT

Natalie Lewis
Bill Jabjiniak
Sara Sorensen

- **Chair's Call To Order**

Chair Wilson called the December 16, 2014 meeting of the Downtown Vision Committee to order at 3:17 P.M. at the Visit Mesa Conference Room, 120 N. Center Street, Mesa, AZ 85201.

- **Approval of Minutes from the December 3, 2014 Committee Meeting Minutes**

Chair Wilson called for a motion to approve the minutes from the meeting held on December 3, 2014.

MOTION: Steve Chucri made a motion to approve the minutes.
SECOND: Debby Elliott
DECISION: Passed unanimously

- **City's Transit Director Presentation - Light Rail Update**

This agenda item tabled to the January 27, 2015 meeting.

- **City's Arts and Cultural Director Presentation - Arts and Cultural Programs**

This agenda item tabled to the January 27, 2015 meeting.

- **City's Economic Development Department Presentation**

Bill Jabjiniak and Sara Sorensen provided a PowerPoint presentation – Vision for the Future of Downtown Mesa.

The focus of the presentation is to share current and future efforts, potential and opportunities to activate, revitalize and transform the appearance of the traditional downtown square mile between Country Club Drive, University Drive, Mesa Drive and Broadway Road.

Population statistics show an estimated 2,540 residents in downtown by 2019, fairly flat growth rate. Downtown Mesa has a diverse group of race and ethnicity and a fairly equal mix of age groups, the largest age group presented are 65 and older. In order to increase the nightlife and entertainment younger age groups need to be attracted who will activate downtown and become involved in the community.

Statistics were shared on the population's educational attainment and average income. Out of 1,771 residents of 25 years and older, the education attainment resulted in 50.8% having some college to graduate degrees. The average household income in 2014 is \$30,186; 69.9% is \$15,000 - \$34,999. Higher education affects and fuels the economic growth due to increased income resulting in increased entertainment and dining spending.

Destination restaurants that are unique and will pull patrons into the downtown from the surrounding valley are needed. Retail, dining developers and restaurants base their decisions largely on demographics. Although downtown demographics are lacking in the short-term, a much larger demographic with a higher household income can be reached from 5 to 15 minutes surrounding downtown. More than 685,000 with an average household income of \$62,500 can be reached within 15 minutes of the downtown area.

Educational institutions in downtown Mesa have increased after the City launched a higher education recruitment effort. Presently four higher education institutions reside in downtown Mesa totaling more than 2,400 students. Benedictine University with a projected 1,000 by 2018, Wilkes University projects 425 students by 2018, NAU Downtown Campus is at 1,680 plus students and MCC Downtown Campus has a student total of 470 plus. New interest and leads from other schools including two international schools are actively being pursued.

Two new companies have been attracted to downtown Mesa. In the first quarter of 2015 these two companies, Epic Premier Insurance employing up to 60 software developers and the Department of Child Safety with more than 140 employees will occupy three floors of the Old Macdonald Building. This will bring the occupancy of the Old Macdonald Building to 90%.

There are several opportunities for potential customers to be driven into downtown Mesa. Research shows that an estimated 2.5 million visitors come to downtown Mesa to attend events annually. In-depth metrics on the visitors will help analyze who they are, where they come from, what they like and how more people with similar interests can be attracted to downtown. In addition to the annual visitors there are approximately 16,400 weekday workers, a potential 10,000 light rail riders, approximately 2,400 students and 2,400 permanent residents.

The two Cactus League Spring Training facilities for the Chicago Cubs and Oakland Athletics are both in close proximity of downtown Mesa and provide potential for more visitors to downtown.

With the preparation of the new 3.1 mile light rail extension from Sycamore to Mesa Drive along Main Street this is an opportunity to draw attention to downtown. It is important to develop and establish the downtown attractions and activities before the light rail opens.

Parking is ample in downtown Mesa. There are approximately 5,000 off street parking spaces. Free parking is available after 5:00 P.M. and all weekend. A map displaying the parking lots and facilities was included in the presentation.

Strengths for the downtown Mesa area include the 2015 light rail, vacant land available for development in downtown, passion to develop downtown, support from City leadership for "Transformative Projects" and ease of navigation in and through downtown Mesa.

One of the biggest challenges expressed in the presentation is, "Downtown Mesa currently functions more like a 'Commuter Town Center,' rather than a bustling, traditional downtown." Challenges to overcome include small old buildings that may not be up to code, poor storefront visibility, no image, marketing or strong brand. There is a lack of market rate and high-end housing, lack of density, and knowledge of the entrance to downtown. Facilities are under-utilized and not being used for the highest and best use.

Suggestions and programs to overcome these challenges include:

- Encouraging more private owners to take advantage of the City's special programs to bring existing properties to code.
- Discussions regarding the colonnades remaining or being removed to improve visibility.
- Surveys from people in other parts of the valley on how they perceive the image of downtown Mesa.
- Improve the streetscapes with nicer looking buildings, lighting, trees or music to be more inviting and aesthetically pleasing.
- There is a need to bring more people living in downtown to create the live/work environment.

- There is a need to Increase the multifunctional vertical development, and utilize the unused sites, properties and facilities for the highest and best use.

How do we envision the future of Downtown Mesa? To build the vibrancy, character, look, flavor and heritage and a place where people want to go and stay in downtown there are several elements that can help accomplish these goals.

Elements to create a distinctive place include some of the following:

- Quality multifunctional verticality mixed-use redevelopment which yield both economic and fiscal benefits. Mixed-use development examples include ground level retail – dining – or small scale groceries – marketplaces, middle level office and upper levels as condos or apartments.
- Market rate housing and student housing are priorities to help breathe life and create live/work opportunities into the downtown. There are developers beginning to take action.
- The City is currently creating a restaurant program to attract and incentivize downtown locations to create destination restaurants that are diverse, high-quality and mid-priced. Examples were presented of destination restaurants that would include unique dining options with outdoor seating and activities for all seasons, day and night experiences.
- Increasing the look and uniformity of downtown aesthetically will create a place where people will want to live and visit. Suggestions to accomplish this include opening up sidewalks, increasing the walkability, add unique lighting, add music to the streets, add outdoor restaurant dining patios with misters or heaters and enhancing the landscape. These items can be actionable within one year.
- Incorporate a marketing strategy with public relations and paid advertising to draw people and increase knowledge of downtown Mesa.

The Committee was updated on City programs and ways in which the Economic Development Department has strived to help improve downtown.

- Investments from the City and Capital Improvement Programs have helped to grow the arts and education and attractiveness of downtown.
- In 2012 the Central Main Plan was adopted by the Council to create a more active and viable downtown.
- The Sprinkler Program provides grant dollars to small businesses who upgrade older buildings and creating jobs.
- The Economic Development Department efforts to bring new companies and jobs to downtown was successful with the addition of the Department of Child Safety and Epic Premier Insurance moving to downtown in the first quarter of 2015, adding 220 new jobs.
- In an effort to make it easier for businesses such as retail and dining to locate downtown, the Planning, Zoning and Building Department has established form-based code and zoning overlays and entertainment district designation.

Areas in which the City can continue to help were also shared. These include utility credits, fast-tracking permits, GPLETS (Government Property Lase Excise Tax), attractive lease terms on City-controlled property, new market tax credits, and CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) Program Funds for loans, grants, interest reduction

The presentation included an update on the 20 plus acres within the square mile of downtown, located at the SEC of Mesa Drive and University Drive, also known as Site 17. This site is being preserved for quality - high end employment and mixed-use development. Examples were shared of possible options for vertically integrated mixed-use developments.

In addition, a data center opportunity that would be a major downtown asset on the 7.4 acres on the South Center Campus was shared. This property lies within city-owned electric, gas, water, sewer and

chilled water utility service areas. It would increase connectivity to downtown and help attract new tech businesses and high wage jobs. This is a turnkey opportunity with finance and a construction company in place.

To summarize the presentation Mr. Jabjiniak shared the following takeaways:

- Property owners need to invest/reinvest
- Density and diversity; mixed-use developments such as market rate housing, office space for high-quality jobs and destination restaurants
- Identify the long-term vision, but don't forget about the low-hanging fruit
- Increased marketing/promotion
- The vision for downtown Mesa in five years is energized, eclectic, thriving, fun, dynamic, colorful, busy, lively, nightlife, booming and active!

The presentation was opened for questions and discussion. Two points discussed were the importance of the location of the mixed-use developments and how to increase the year round activity.

- **Review overall Committee timeline and provide direction to staff related to a proposed community outreach and involvement approach and timeline for January/February 2015.**

Chair Wilson provided the Committee members with a draft of the overall goals for the Committee, general agenda format for each meeting and meetings to be scheduled in January – May.

Important meeting dates were highlighted:

- January 27, 3:00 P.M., Committee Meeting, City Council Lower Chambers: Arts and Culture, Light Rail Update and Ridership Stats, Review of February Timeline.
- March 10, 3:00 P.M., at Visit Mesa. Facilitated Committee workshop. Draft report.
- March 24, 3:00 P.M., City Council Lower Chambers. Fine-tune report.
- April—final community outreach of report and recommendations.
- April/early May—recommendations to council.

- **Committee discussion and possible direction to staff or committee assignments.**

Tabled to future committee meeting.

- **Confirm next meeting date** – Tuesday, January 27, 3:00 P.M., City Council Lower Chambers, 57 E. First Street.

- **Discuss and provide direction on the primary agenda items next meeting.**

Tabled to future committee meeting.

- **Items from citizens present**

No items presented from citizens present.

- **Adjournment**

Chair Wilson called for a motion to adjourn the board meeting at 4:28 P.M.

MOTION: Charles Huellmantel made to adjourn meeting.

SECOND: Steve Chucri

Submitted By:

Jo Wilson, Chair
(Prepared by Beth Ann Moore)