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Chandler won't skimp on plans for downtown

By Ari Cohn
Tribune



Pictured is an artist's rendering of the commercial portion of the San Marcos Commons complex. The clock tower will be located at the northwest corner of Buffalo Street and Arizona Avenue.

The ongoing economic downturn may mean a delay in the realization of Chandler's vision for redeveloping its downtown into a thriving core, but city officials and a major downtown builder are bullish on the district.

Niels Kreipke, president of the Desert Viking development firm, which has been involved in downtown projects for more than a decade, said he hopes to present designs for an additional 150,000 square feet of commercial space containing retail, restaurants and offices on the historic square to the City Council this fall.

Work starts on \$76 million City Hall [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/138947>]

Chandler pays \$450,000 for City Hall site [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/137274>]

The designs for Kreipke's San Marcos Commons include a five-story clock tower on the northwest corner of Arizona Avenue and Buffalo Street, according to artists' renderings. It's a high-profile location.

"There's no doubt the economic times are delaying things, but we're still moving forward and being aggressive," he said.

San Marcos Commons is billed as one of the first residential communities in downtown Chandler, stretching along the north side of the historic Crowne Plaza San Marcos Resort. So far, 37 of the project's planned 79 townhomes have been completed, and a total of 30 have been sold, Kreipke said. Foundations have been poured for the remaining units, but the expected completion date has been pushed back about six months because of the economy, he said.

The units, up to three stories tall, are done in Spanish Colonial and Mission-style architecture, and are selling from \$200,000 to \$300,000, he said.

"We've been averaging about one a week, which in this market is fantastic," Kreipke said.

The city's South Arizona Avenue Entry Corridor Study, which the City Council adopted early last year, lays out how Chandler officials expect the future downtown to look. The intent is to create a pedestrian-friendly community core.

As the area redevelops, the highest, most dense construction would front Arizona Avenue, then transition downward as it moves out toward adjacent neighborhoods, officials have said. Chandler's new \$74 million City Hall, with construction now under way, is expected to help that redevelopment along.

Some aspects of the city's downtown redevelopment plan, such as spending up to \$9.3 million to narrow a portion of Arizona Avenue, have been controversial. The City Council last month voted 4-3 to reduce Arizona Avenue from six lanes to four just south of Chandler Boulevard over the objections of several area business owners.

Critics of the roadway plan have said the expected reduction in vehicular traffic could hurt area businesses. Construction is expected to be completed by the end of next year, when the new City Hall is slated to be done.

Teri Killgore, Chandler's downtown redevelopment manager, said that despite the economic recession, there are no plans to compromise on the city's vision.

"We always envisioned this taking years, not weeks," Killgore said. "It's been more about timing than about changing projects."

Officials are expecting the construction market to show signs of recovery sometime next year, she said.

"Interest has picked up some, but so far that hasn't translated into projects," Killgore said.

Kreipke said several businesses are considering space at San Marcos Commons, but the development agreement needs to be finalized and financing secured before contracts can be signed with potential tenants.

"Good projects can still get financing. It just takes a little more creativity in how to get those projects done," he said. "We're still confident that we can bring projects forward."

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