

First look: Proposed degree programs, renderings for ASU's downtown Mesa campus



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'I think we've all had our fingers crossed to see what ASU is going to bring us,' Mayor John Giles said.



(Photo: Colwell Shelor/Weddle Gilmore/West 8)

Arizona State University's proposed downtown Mesa satellite campus could include a mix of arts, education, entrepreneurship and tech programs, as well as a preparatory academy and student housing, according to a project update released Thursday.

ASU officials' presentation shed light on what both city officials and community residents have been calling the "make-or-break" element of the development, billed as a mixed-use campus that would integrate existing city buildings, new educational facilities and commercial space.

Programming options have been under wraps in the three months since [Mesa Mayor John Giles announced a possible ASU presence downtown \(/story/news/local/mesa/2016/02/04/asu-campus-mesa-john-giles-state-of-the-city/79639836/\)](#), even as location details and facility designs emerged.

"We have worked really, really hard over the last few months to ensure that the programs that we're going to bring to Mesa are not only complementary to ASU and to the downtown area, but are also complementary to the other higher-education institutions located here in Mesa," ASU spokeswoman Angela Creedon said at a Thursday council study session.

"We did a very thorough evaluation of other programs presently being offered, and we made sure that anything we're doing would not be competitive in nature."

The project is expected to cover the [square block bound by Main, Center and First streets and Centennial Way \(/story/news/local/mesa/2016/04/14/mesa-reveals-likely-site-downtown-asu-campus/82909558/\)](#) — known as the Mesa City Center — and part of the Mesa Arts Center campus on the south side of Main.

Although the programming recommendations were well-received Thursday, elected officials are unsure taxpayers will agree to fund the sprawling campus, which would cost tens of millions of dollars.

Mesa and ASU are working under a June 10 deadline to develop an intergovernmental agreement [\(/story/news/local/mesa/2016/03/23/mesa-asu-begin-talks-downtown-mesa-satellite-campus/81909662/\)](#) finalizing campus plans, cost estimates and financing options, and the council has until the end of June to decide whether to put the project on the November ballot.

If voters approve the campus concept, Mesa will pay for building construction and ASU will be responsible for furnishing and maintaining the facilities.

There are six elements the university would like to include.

Performing and media arts zone



A rendering of the proposed ASU campus in downtown Mesa. (Photo: Colwell Shelor/Wedde Gilmore/West 8)

Given the campus' "urban plaza" feel and its proximity to the Mesa Arts Center, ASU believes an emphasis on art, music, dance, film and media-engineering programs would be a natural fit.

"We have a fairly new dean at the Herberger Institute (for Design and the Arts) who has a vision of not just keeping everything on the Tempe campus, but expanding and embedding our arts programs throughout the region," Rick Naimark, the university's associate vice president for program-development planning, told the council.

Architects have envisioned a largely transparent building on the south side of Main Street that would allow passers-by to see performances or rehearsals. The first floor likely would have restaurants or other commercial uses.

"I think the opportunities for people to see in and connect to the creative activities that are going on are going to be tremendously interesting for people who just want to be in the city center," Naimark said.

Vice Mayor Dennis Kavanaugh mentioned Mesa Community College's extensive performing-arts program, saying it would be a "great complement, segue and partnership" if MCC arts students could transition and continue their studies at a nearby ASU campus.

Gaming and sensory-technology institute

Human-computer interaction is a cutting-edge research field at ASU, Naimark said, but the university still has "a lot of growth to do in that area." Its smart-building initiative, where researchers explore how facilities can react to occupants and collect data, is also in its infancy.

Those programs ideally would be combined with applied-sensory technology and gaming to create a high-tech institute on the downtown Mesa campus, Naimark said.

"We're not really talking about video-game design ... although that's also an element of it," he said. "What I'm really talking about is using digital technology to create new ways of educating people — gaming for physical and mental rehabilitation, those kinds of things."

Councilman Alex Finter said he had seen several recent reports about the potential for lucrative growth in those four areas.

"(The institute) stands out to me as an area that could really give distinction to this campus," he said.

Education and research hub

Giles long had hinted at the desire for an educational component on the downtown campus.

Early-childhood education in particular has been a focus for both Mesa and ASU in recent months, with [Mesa creating a task force \(/story/news/local/mesa/2015/11/13/education-how-mesa-plans-help-its-most-vulnerable-kids/75575588/\)](#) to analyze population data, service gaps and possible funding sources to create a list of recommendations to help with kindergarten preparedness.

ASU is considering moving some of its master's students to the downtown Mesa site, as well as establishing a research center where grad students could work with children, Naimark said.

"You can't learn how to teach kids better and how to try new techniques without actually having the kids around," Naimark said. "It seems like this (location) makes sense for something like that."

ASU also sees potential for a professional education center that could include everything from adult-learning courses and English classes for international students to emergency-management training.

"We don't want to talk about just 20-year-olds or 25-year-olds or 30-year-olds," Naimark said. "We want to continue to be a partner in educating the broader community."

Creativity and commerce core

Both Mesa and ASU officials have said they want to leverage partnerships between budding entrepreneurs and existing businesses at the new satellite campus, a dynamic that already exists at the university's Polytechnic campus in southeast Mesa.

ASU officials suggested creating a hands-on space to produce and showcase young engineers' and entrepreneurs' work.

Naimark also discussed relocating [LaunchPoint, an east Mesa business accelerator that has failed to pick up speed \(/story/news/local/mesa/2016/02/11/mesa-business-accelerator-launchpoint-stuck-low-gear/79305872/\)](#) since its 2013 opening. Unlike business incubators, which support startups working to flesh out fledgling ideas, LaunchPoint was to focus on "adolescent" companies with more advanced tech-based proposals.

Councilman Kevin Thompson, whose district includes LaunchPoint, said he believes the accelerator's far-east location and a lack of space and equipment needed to manufacture tangible prototypes has held it back.

"In my opinion, there needs to be the ability for the entrepreneur or the student to actually build the widget that he or she is designing," he said. "I would hope that as we look at developing this entrepreneur center that it does become more of a ... design where you're getting more of a hands-on experience."

Preparatory academy

In addition to university programs, ASU officials said they are interested in creating another ASU Preparatory Academy location on the campus, assuming the facility would have city and Mesa Public Schools backing.

The university already [runs two such K-12 charter schools in downtown Phoenix and at the Polytechnic campus \(/story/news/local/phoenix/2015/06/05/asu-edu-school-graduates-first-class/28540913/\)](#) to prepare students for college.

Student housing

Although ASU stressed it doesn't expect to Mesa to pay for construction of student housing, officials did ask for city support in allowing such developments to locate downtown.

"If we bring a significant number of students here, it's going to open up a real possibility for housing developers with whom we work regularly in the student-housing world, or even just private developers," Naimark said.

"Right now, there's no good concentration of housing along the light rail where faculty and grad students and students with families have the opportunity to live and be able to go back and forth to the various campuses," he said, "so we think this is a really exciting opportunity."



Resident survey: "How excited are you about a potential ASU campus in downtown Mesa?"

Source: Ongoing online survey being conducted by the Retail, Arts, Innovation & Livability Group, which advocates for "responsible development" of housing and transit options and job creation along Mesa's light-rail corridor. Results are as of April 12, 2016.

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