

Before and after: \$2M makeover will create Mesa 'micro parks'

\$2M MAKEOVER WILL CREATE MESA 'MICRO PARKS'

Five largely overlooked patches of Fiesta District land will be converted into "micro parks" this year. Here's what they might look like.

Maria Polletta/The Republic



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(Photo: Mesa)

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The city envisions the pocket-sized parks as "pedestrian refuge areas" along Southern Avenue, with seating, landscaping, shade and bike racks.

Four parks will be on south side of Southern, on either side of Longmore and on either side of Stewart Street. One will be on the north side of Southern, just west of Longmore.

Mesa engineering spokeswoman Michele Arrollado said the overhauls will "support and encourage a walking- and cycling-friendly environment in the Fiesta District."

Construction is set to begin in March and last about six months.

The parks are just one phase of an \$11-plus million Southern Avenue streetscape project designed to support what Mesa hopes will be a revival of the Fiesta area, which has deteriorated in a struggling retail economy. The city wants to encourage pedestrian activity and connect the district's residential areas to assets such as Mesa Community College and Banner Desert and Cardon Children's medical centers.

The first phase of the project involved narrowing Southern to two lanes in each direction between Sycamore and Alma School Road, to allow for wider sidewalks and landscaping. The city also added benches, more lighting and traffic signals, bike racks and colored paving.

"I have been getting many positive comments on the new landscaping, lights and colors," said Vice Mayor Dennis Kavanaugh, who represents the district. "People have noted that once the construction barriers went away, there have been few, if any, traffic problems with the reduction in lanes."

Kavanaugh said the next phase, the creation of the micro parks, "will add nice shade and color and seating."

"Who knows?" he said. "You might see street performers from the MCC performing-arts programs or from the Mesa Arts Center showing up in those pocket parks from time to time."

A federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement grant will cover about \$1.8 million of the micro-park phase, according to the city. Mesa's local street-sales tax will cover the remaining \$380,000.

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