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Mayor of Mesa airs plans for 4 job hubs

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By Maria Polletta
The Republic of Central.com
Mon Feb 18, 2013 8:58 PM

Mesa Mayor Scott Smith at a recent news briefing elaborated on the four "innovation districts" he announced at his January mayor's breakfast, hinting that steering committee iMesa could take the lead in how to implement the city's vision for the four economic hubs.

"(Mesa's) future ... is really related to our ability to create high-quality jobs," he said, adding that Mesa's downtown, Fiesta District, Falcon Field Airport and Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport are "places where we believe we have a real opportunity to create an innovation culture and an innovation economy."

Recent policy making and infrastructure development already have targeted those areas.

"We have somewhat shifted the focus (of iMesa) from coming up with transformational projects to maybe something a little bit more along the lines of keeping what we have, and these innovation centers work perfectly with what iMesa is," Smith said.

"We might give them, for example ... the task of really finding some innovative ways to maximize what you might do with one of these specific innovation districts. We might find a specific area and have them work on that."

Tentative starting points for each district:

Gateway: Smith sees growth potential at the airport and its surrounding area, which includes Arizona State University's Polytechnic campus, Chandler-Gilbert Community College and AZLabs.

Falcon Field: Smith said that opportunity lies in existing buildings and infill properties and that the city would "love to see Boeing double, triple, quadruple their operations there."

Fiesta District: Key drivers include Banner Health and Mesa Community College.

Downtown: "We own a lot of land. ... We have four colleges and universities coming in," Smith said, also highlighting light rail and Mesa Arts Center as

economic drivers.

Smith stressed that while iMesa might choose to focus its energies on the innovation-district project, that decision is not set in stone. In the meantime, Smith will be presenting proposals on how to best implement the plans to city staff and the City Council to get discussions moving.

"We hope working with our economic-development office, working with the institutions and organizations that I've mentioned, we can come up with some specific plans as to how we can best develop those districts into job creators," he said.

The mayor also offered updates on other city projects:


Facilities for the Chicago Cubs and Oakland Athletics are "moving along," he said, with the Cubs facility on schedule for completion this fall, well before the beginning of spring training in February 2014. The city is working with the A's to come up with final design components for Fitch Park and Hohokam Stadium.

AZLabs — which Mesa initially lobbied federal officials to reuse with the hope that it would attract high-wage defense and research jobs to the southeast Valley — is still working out how to lease spaces most

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effectively, Smith said. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been funneled into structural improvements to ready the lab for tenants.

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