

Mesa eyes eminent domain for Fiesta 'micro parks'

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The Mesa City Council will be asked to approve the use of eminent domain to acquire land for several "micro parks" in the Fiesta District.



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The Mesa City Council will be asked on Monday, March 17, to approve the use of eminent domain, if necessary, to acquire land for several "micro parks" in the Fiesta District.

City Engineer Beth Huning, in a report to the council, described the tiny parks as "pedestrian refuge areas" along Southern Avenue between Alma School Road and Longmore.

"The nodes will include amenities such as seating, signs, lighting, landscaping, hardscape, shade structures and water features," Huning said.

Hardscape refers to the creative use of concrete, bricks, pavers and similar elements.

The parks are part of an \$11.8 million Southern Avenue reconstruction and streetscape project designed to accommodate what Mesa hopes will be a renaissance for the Fiesta area, hard-hit in recent years by a struggling retail economy.

Five such "nodes" are planned. Four are on the south side of Southern, on either side of Longmore and on either side of South Stewart Street. One will be on the north side of Southern just west of Longmore.

Huning said Mesa needs title to six parcels and temporary construction easements on two others. She said Mesa began trying to acquire the properties in January but efforts are complicated by the fact that some parcels have multiple or corporate owners.

She said Mesa will try to negotiate with the owners even if the City Council approves her request to authorize the use of eminent domain. If Mesa and the owners can't agree on price, the issue would be settled in court.

"In the meantime," Huning said, "the law allows a court to issue an order allowing the city to use the property to construct the project while the issue of 'just compensation' is still being negotiated."

Huning said Mesa is in a hurry to close on the properties because federal grants are funding part of the Fiesta streetscape project. Mesa must certify that it has the required right-of-way by June 1 or risk losing the federal money.

Mesa wants to encourage pedestrian activity in the Fiesta District, which includes MCC, Banner Desert and Cardon Children's medical centers, Fiesta Mall and dense residential areas.

Councilman Dennis Kavanaugh, who represents the Fiesta District, said investors are showing new interest in the neighborhood but he believes redevelopment is more likely to involve offices than retail. He expects at least one major deal to close this spring.

The streetscape project, which will reduce Southern to two lanes in each direction, is scheduled for completion in September. Last year Mesa voters approved bonds that will carry the project west to the Tempe border.

New Riverview athletic fields

Also Monday, the council is expected to approve an approximately \$500,000 contract with Haydon Building Corp. for the first phase of construction of athletic fields at Riverview Park.

The multi-use field will replace four softball fields in the park's northeast corner that were obliterated during reconstruction of the park and the Chicago Cubs stadium project.

The Cubs-Riverview complex already has expansive sodded areas east of the stadium that can be used for athletic fields and that currently double as parking for Cubs games.

Those areas, however, are targeted for commercial development. The northern portion, in fact, will be dug up after this Cactus League season for construction of a Sheraton hotel, and Mesa wants to move as quickly as possible to flesh out the southern pads as well.

Huning told the council that construction of the northern athletic fields must be expedited so they can double as parking for spring-training fans a year from now.

A second contract, amount as yet unspecified, will be awarded to Haydon to complete the fields.

Although the softball fields will not be replaced at Riverview, Mesa will expand its softball field inventory using 2012 bond money.

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