

SOUTHWEST VALLEY

Avondale votes to revitalize its historic downtown area. Here's what it might look like

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More townhomes, restaurants, splash pads, parks and murals. That's part of the plan to make south Avondale a hotspot destination within five years.

The \$6.3 million plan seeks to revamp three historic parts of the city with high-density housing options, neighborhood "beautification" efforts, space for recreation and a walkable downtown that offers shops, restaurants and entertainment options.

The goal is to make Avondale an entertainment hub for all Valley residents.

Mayor Kenn Weise and the six City Council members unanimously approved the plan that suggests changes to the Old Town, Cashion and Las Ligas/Rio Vista areas.

The historic spots sit south of Van Buren Street, bounded by 107th Avenue on the east and Litchfield Road to the west.

The region is mostly residential, but city-owned vacant lots combined with the area's historic roots, nostalgic landmarks and proximity to transportation corridors make the area ripe for a redeveloped downtown embellished with historic insignia, string lights and custom lamp posts, the plan says.

The vote is a signal of what council members would like to see for the area's future but does not immediately change anything for Avondale.

The council would first need to vote on a series of actions, from funding marketing campaigns to providing tax incentives to prospective developers.

"It's a plan that can be changed and renewed," Councilmember Curtis Nielson said. "It's a starting point to get people excited about what's happening in these different areas."

What changes could come

Growth in the area would start with bringing more residents, consultants from Elliot D. Pollack, a real estate and economic consulting firm, said in a report compiled for Avondale.

The south Avondale population is smaller than cities like Gilbert or Chandler, which have downtowns similar to what Avondale seeks.

But more than 20,000 residents are expected to move into southern Avondale by 2030, according to the Maricopa Association of Governments.

"By 2040, Historic Avondale is expected to mirror the population density of both Downtown Chandler and Downtown Gilbert," the report says.

To accommodate the growth, the city plan suggests providing more diverse housing options.

Dense housing

The historic area plan calls for more high-density housing options, like townhomes and condominiums, in south Avondale. The hope is that more residents tightly compacted in one area will attract more businesses.

The plan suggests three locations where townhomes could be built in the Old Town area, including potentially the southeast corner of East Hill Drive and North Third Street.

Parks, recreation space

City-owned vacant lots could be converted into open-space parks and splash pads. The Dennis DeConcini Park at Western Avenue and Fourth Street "could be enhanced with a splash pad, added seating and shade areas," the plan says. The city could also add public art installations and landscaping.

The same goes for vacant lots at 111th Avenue and Pima Street in Cashion. "The vision for this neighborhood pocket park is to provide a small-scale toddler play space," the plan says.

The undeveloped land with abandoned industrial facilities on Buckeye Road between Avondale Boulevard and 107th Avenue could be converted to a park similar to the Dessie Lorenz Park, the plan says.

Restaurants, entertainment spots

Carolina's and Laura's Burgers in Old Town are two destination restaurants that should be amplified with surrounding shops, the plan says. These restaurants could serve as anchors that fuel the area's popularity, city officials said, like Old Joe's BBQ in Gilbert.

The plan also suggests renovating the Sernas Park Plaza at Western Avenue and Fifth Street to make it more a more vibrant gathering space for arts and culture. The existing Police Department building, which is slated to be relocated, could be repurposed into a mercado that could help bring jobs to the area, the report says.

More neighborhoods within Old Town may also see a change. The plan suggests including additional neighborhoods near Western Avenue as part of the "Old Town Avondale Business District" or "OTAB."

The designation means homes can can "coexist" alongside businesses like "boutiques, cafes or professional offices," the plan says. The designation also could provide flexibility for entrepreneurial residents who want to start businesses from their home.

Historic insignia

Entryway signage that fosters a sense of space is crucial to making Old Town a destination for Valley residents, the plan says.

The city could place signage at four intersections bounding the Old Town district: Western and Central avenues, Western Avenue and Dysart Road, Buckeye and Dysart roads and Central Avenue and Main Street.

Signs would be placed at four locations along Buckeye Road between 107th and 113th avenues in Cashion and at Lower Buckeye and El Mirage roads in Las Ligas and Rio Vista.

Area neighborhoods could receive insignia designating historic status.

Old landmarks that shine a light on the city's history and farming roots should be reused to "invigorate" areas, the plan says. It points to the abandoned grain silo facility along Buckeye Road between Avondale Boulevard and 107th Avenue as an example. The structure, which has "historic and nostalgic value," could serve as a brewery, event space or fitness facility to enliven the area.

Commercial business

Light industrial and warehouse style businesses could take advantage of vacant space throughout the historic areas, the Elliot D. Pollack report says.

How to make the vision a reality

The plan calls on the City Council to spend \$6.3 million to bring the downtown vision to fruition.

The city already has funded \$400,000 on some of the suggestions, such as \$200,000 on more police patrols and another \$200,000 to designate parts of Old Town a "Central Business District and Redevelopment Area."

That designation allows the city to give certain tax incentives to area businesses.

The unfunded initiatives include:

- \$2 million to develop a mercado near Sam Garcia Library.

- \$1.9 million on "placemaking," which includes funds for string lights in Old Town, marketing for special events like food truck rallies and public art installations.

- \$1.3 million on public infrastructure like parking enhancements.

- \$500,000 on incentives for incoming restaurants, small businesses and entertainment venues.

- \$345,000 on branding and marketing.

- parks, and adding restrooms to existing parks.

- \$30,000 for rezoning

Incentives to businesses could come in the form of the city rezoning certain areas as various types of tax districts.

Avondale could also offer businesses tax breaks in the form of Government Property Lease Excise Taxes. GPLETs replace businesses' property taxes with less costly excise taxes.

It brings less revenue to the city, and neighbors end up fronting the cost. But supporters say it's sometimes the only way to bring in a desired business.

Avondale city officials argue private investment and resident buy-in will be necessary to make the area a success.

Avondale spent \$69 million on the Old Town, Cashion and Las Ligas/Rio Vista areas between 2000 and 2020, according to city documents.

Mayor Weise said the city has no problem spending more if the changes are driven by engaged residents, and not "unilateral" decision making from the city.

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