

# Mesa Fiesta District gets first housing in 20 years



Parker Leavitt, The Republic | azcentral.com 5:05 a.m. MST May 11, 2015



(Photo: City of Mesa)

West Mesa's Fiesta District turned another page in its years-long redevelopment story on Wednesday as officials broke ground on the area's first new housing in more than 20 years.

Southern Avenue Villas, expected to open in spring 2016, will bring 354 apartments and around 700 residents to the aging area around Fiesta Mall. The \$41 million complex is being built on 20 acres at the southwestern corner of Southern Avenue and Extension Road.

The apartments will range from one bedroom and 552 square feet to three bedrooms and 1,282 square feet, said Mike Kron, chief operating officer for developer Frankel Family Trust. Rent could start around \$600 to \$700 for the smaller units and \$1,100 to \$1,200 for the larger ones, he said.

Located next to the Courtyard by Marriott hotel on property considered the eastern gateway to the Fiesta District, the complex includes eight three-story buildings, with architecture reminiscent of higher-end row houses.

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Amenities at Southern Avenue Villas will include a clubhouse, pool, cabanas, sand volleyball court, playground and dog park. Vertical construction should be visible at the site within the next six months, Kron said.

The company is looking to cast a wide net to attract a variety of tenants to the complex, Kron said. That will likely include some students, with Mesa Community College just a mile away, but also employees from Banner Desert Medical Center, the college and nearby offices, he said.

Frankel Family Trust bought the 20-acre site in 2006 with the intention of developing a mixed-use project, including multi-family housing, retail and offices, Kron said. Those plans were shelved, however, when the recession hit.

For the past eight years, the company has leased the land for a seasonal Christmas tree lot, something that won't be coming back this year due to construction.

"While we're losing a Christmas tree lot, we're gaining something I think the city is going to be proud to have," Kron said.



A groundbreaking ceremony for Southern Avenue Villas in Mesa's Fiesta District was held Wednesday, May 6, 2015. (Photo: Parker Leavitt/The Arizona Republic)

As demand for residential construction began to rebound in recent years, the developer submitted new plans for apartments only, scrapping the commercial element. With other office projects in the works around the Fiesta area, the city was fine with the change, said Councilman Dennis Kavanaugh, who represents the area.

Instead, the company was asked to design the project according to city guidelines for the Fiesta District, and Kavanaugh said the complex features an urban, shaded streetscape that will match the city's recent redesign of Southern Avenue.

Kavanaugh said he sees the project as something sustainable in the long term, with the possibility of light rail coming through the area within the next two decades.

The apartment complex is the latest of several development announcements within the Fiesta District, which is enjoying a significant rebound after years of decline.

In March, officials unveiled plans for the Fiesta Corporate Campus inside the struggling Fiesta Mall. The project will replace the vacant Macy's department store with 158,000 square feet of offices, with the potential to generate 900 to 2,000 jobs.

Across the street from Fiesta Mall, Project Centrica is nearly finished after converting an abandoned Circuit City and Bed, Bath and Beyond into Class A office space. Also in the area, Upper Iowa University has occupied a former Borders bookstore and a vacant Chevy's restaurant has been razed to make way for new retail.

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