



MESA FORWARD 2033

DESTINATION MASTER PLAN





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Almost 1,000 residents in Mesa and the rest of the East Valley participated in developing the Mesa Forward 2033 destination master plan. Every strategy and initiative in this 10-year road map to optimize Mesa's visitor economy was suggested by community members to benefit as many local businesses, organizations and residents as possible.

Mesa Forward 2033 was produced by Visit Mesa to optimize the East Valley's visitor economy. In 2022, visitor spending injected more than \$710 million into the local economy. Those dollars helped ensure the success of many area business; they supported more than 7,700 jobs; and they generated \$81.1 million in state and local tax revenues.

This destination master plan aims to increase annual visitor spending beyond \$1 billion in the next decade. Undeniably, the East Valley is incredibly well positioned to evolve into a major visitor destination based on its physical assets, cultural attributes and social fabric.

However, a plan is only as good as the execution behind it. Mesa Forward 2033 will require ambitious, thoughtful and collaborative-minded people across all sectors who want to champion and lead specific initiatives proposed in the plan. This plan for tomorrow needs leaders today with the will to build coalitions of people who are passionate about the region's future.

There are three primary objectives for this destination master plan. They were established early in the project to define shared goals, which the vast majority of local community and industry stakeholders wholeheartedly support:

1. Improve the overall destination experience for visitors in the leisure, meetings, sports tourism and outdoor recreation markets, as well as for residents
2. Increase and diversify year-round visitor volumes and visitor spending in more parts of the East Valley during more times of the year
3. Align industry and community stakeholders around a shared vision for the future that embraces quality, inclusivity, accessibility and sustainability

The first objective relates to destination, industry, product and experience development. The second builds on the success of that with a focus on destination marketing. The third objective is about aligning the public, private and civic sectors, which is key for accomplishing the first two goals.

Guiding Principles

To help ensure and enhance that spirit of community alignment, the process to develop Mesa Forward 2033 embraced four guiding principles to keep a clear focus on priorities. These four principles helped unite the community and they defined what shared success looks like for the future of Mesa and its visitor economy:

1. Quality of life and quality of place are foundational requirements for the future success of Mesa and the East Valley.
2. Mesa residents embrace diversity, equity and inclusion, which is critical for building on the true meaning of community.
3. People of all physical/cognitive abilities should have opportunities to thrive.
4. Environmental sustainability must be a priority to ensure Mesa's long-term future.

During a full year of community engagement in the many focus groups, workshops, individual interviews and the resident survey, the community stated what it wants. It is now up to everyone in the community to collaborate and pool resources so they can lean into what they said they prioritize, and ultimately, capitalize on the many opportunities throughout the East Valley in the decade ahead.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategic Framework

To increase visitor spending beyond \$1 billion dollars yearly in the next decade, these are the five key strategic goals in the Mesa Forward 2033 destination master plan. Together, they are what a diverse aggregate of East Valley business owners and residents believe will enhance the vitality of their communities by attracting more visitor dollars.

- 1. Develop Downtown Mesa Into a Creative, Cultural Innovation District**
- 2. Develop More Dynamic Events**
- 3. Develop Visitor Industry Clusters Throughout the Region**
- 4. Establish Mesa as a Leading Sports Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Capital**
- 5. Increase Industry and Community Alignment**

The implementation process to move this plan forward involves developing flow charts that identify community and industry leaders who are willing to participate in executing the action items. There should also be timelines, targets and performance measurements established to ensure accountability and promote successes.

THIS PLAN FOR TOMORROW NEEDS LEADERS TODAY.

Some of the plan's initiatives are short-term and can bear fruit quickly. Other initiatives will require sustained efforts and resources for years to come.

Many people living and working in the East Valley contributed to developing Mesa Forward 2033. Together, they have identified what they believe is best for the future of Mesa and the region.

Visitors want to be part of that future. They want to come to Mesa and spend their money to support local businesses and organizations. It is up to the community now to help visitors do just that, so residents and business owners can create a better life for themselves, their loved ones and their neighbors.



MESA FORWARD 2033

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Co-Chairs

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East Valley Partnership

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Tourism Authority

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Client Success





INTRODUCTION

Mesa has come a long way in just a few short years. Civic pride has increased exponentially as established locals and new residents embrace all the energy and developments transforming the East Valley. The Mesa Forward 2033 destination master plan is designed to help steer and support that growth by optimizing the local visitor economy for the next 10 years.

Downtown Mesa is a key catalyst. The surge of new businesses and resident housing, the arrival of ASU at Mesa City Center, and the City of Mesa's smart investments in infrastructure are just a few factors creating a more vibrant urban core. New hotels are under development, and the collection of cultural venues are stellar. Also, the light rail system is the envy of many cities, and its value will increase substantially as Downtown Mesa achieves a greater critical mass of businesses, residents and visitors in close proximity.

In effect, Mesa is rebuilding Main Street America with an emphasis of local, independent placemaking. The City of Mesa and Visit Mesa are helping accelerate that with a diverse slate of local programs and partnerships with organizations including Local First, Mesa Chamber of Commerce, East Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Co+Hoots workspace, and Prestamos small business assistance program, among others.

Around the rest of the East Valley, there are many more reasons to be excited about the region's collective future, which are further supported by visitor revenue.

New and innovative sports facilities for all ages, new and updated hotels, vibrant culinary and cultural scenes, and the unbelievably beautiful mountain-desert scenery for outdoor recreation are changing what it means to visit, live, work, play and learn in Mesa.

The development of the Mesa Forward 2033 destination plan was intentional about identifying opportunities to optimize the visitor economy for the full scope of the East Valley. In effect, Downtown Mesa is the primary

MESA IS A CITY OF LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES.

commercial hub of the city, with many different corridors leading to visitor venues and experiences in the west, northeast and southeast of the valley. Defining and developing Mesa as an integrated mosaic of

intriguing communities and environments is necessary for growing visitor volumes at scale over the next decade where travelers can customize their journey based on their personal and professional interests. The East Valley is very much a sum of unique experiences, attitudes and lifestyles greater than the parts.

Furthermore, the City of Mesa, local business and a wide range of community organizations are working together to elevate Mesa as a place where people of all backgrounds and abilities are welcome. Creating that sense of belonging is critical for economic and community development to attract corporate investment and outside talent, elevate quality of life and opportunities for all residents, and enhance the brand and reputation for the city overall. It cannot be overstated how important diversity, equity and inclusion is to the future of Mesa.



INTRODUCTION

Building Mesa for the Future

The world is changing and Mesa is faced with new and/or growing macro challenges like all major metros in the country. Among the most severe, workforce capacity issues in Mesa are especially hampering business development in the tourism and hospitality sector. Community and industry leaders are seeing that in site selection reviews, talent retention efforts, etc. The City of Mesa, Visit Mesa and many other local organizations are eager to collaborate to support workforce development initiatives and new training programs across the East Valley.

For example, Northern Arizona's School of Hotel and Restaurant Management is opening the Mesa Workforce Development Center (MWDC) in 2024. The MWDC will offer high-quality and convenient education and training programs to rebuild and expand the hospitality workforce in Mesa and surrounding communities. These types of initiatives need to be a greater priority for industry stakeholders for the next decade and beyond, especially for 1- and 2-year certificate programs to ensure broader representation for all residents.

Lastly, all the amazing new developments in advanced industries, airport infrastructure, and educational and medical facilities are providing the foundation necessary to achieve Mesa's optimal future. Those investments are increasing Mesa's competitiveness across every indicator as it eventually evolves into Arizona's second largest city.

Mesa is a city of limitless opportunities. Based on all the above, the region is a place where growing numbers of people want to buy a home, raise a family, open a business, and/or go to school. Increasing visitor revenue coming into Mesa helps accelerate those opportunities. These are imported visitor dollars paying local salaries and wages, as well as taxes to fund infrastructure improvements, services and amenities.

The Mesa Forward 2033 destination master plan is a road map designed specifically for prioritizing how to increase those visitor dollars. The stewards of this plan will have a significant impact on how Mesa evolves long-term.



PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

The goals and intended outcomes for the Mesa Forward 2033 destination master plan are based on optimizing the region's visitor economy to support local community and economic development strategy across Mesa.

THE STATED OBJECTIVES FOR THIS PLAN ARE:



Improve the overall destination experience for visitors in the leisure, meetings, sports tourism and outdoor recreation markets, as well as for residents



Increase and diversify year-round visitor volumes and visitor spending in more parts of the East Valley during more times of the year



Align industry and community stakeholders around a shared vision for the future that embraces quality, inclusivity, accessibility and sustainability



4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Visit Mesa and its industry/community partners who participated in developing Mesa Forward 2033 embrace four guiding principles: Quality, Inclusivity, Accessibility and Sustainability. These values established the tone for all the community engagement, and they provided a due north for all strategic planning.

1 **Quality of life and quality of place are foundational requirements for the future success of Mesa and the East Valley.**

Mesa has plentiful work opportunities and lifestyle experiences to offer residents and visitors. There are several world-class venues in the East Valley. Downtown Mesa is being developed as the Main Street of the future. And the quality of the mountain-desert landscape is unparalleled across much of the Southwest. Identifying that is key to this master plan.

2 **Mesa residents embrace diversity, equity and inclusion, which is critical for building on the true meaning of community.**

Mesa is a place where residents and visitors of all backgrounds are welcomed. Anyone can find their own community in the East Valley, and anyone can feel a sense of belonging. That is a competitive advantage for the leisure, sports and meetings visitor markets, and the value of that cannot be overemphasized. When Mesa purports to be a city of limitless opportunities, that means for everyone.

3 **People of all physical/cognitive abilities should have opportunities to thrive.**

Mesa established itself as a leader in accessibility when it developed the Autism Certification framework. There are now discussions to expand that across the neurodivergent spectrum. Likewise, the public and private sectors are prioritizing the need for venues and experiences that provide for people of all abilities. Accessibility has become a mainstream priority globally, and Mesa has an opportunity to forge the future of how cities work for everyone.

4 **Environmental sustainability must be a priority to ensure Mesa's long-term future.**

The City of Mesa's Climate Action Plan established the necessary strategies for mitigating the region's increasing carbon levels. There are many ways for the local visitor industry to support those initiatives, ranging from embracing renewable energy to investing in the City's "Trees Are Cool" program. This is really about future-proofing the East Valley for generations of residents and businesses.





PROJECT PLAN

From August 2022 through July 2023, MMGY NextFactor and Visit Mesa collaborated on developing this 10-year destination master plan to guide how all industry and community leaders can co-lead the future of travel and tourism in the East Valley. The project team engaged existing and non-traditional stakeholders in an extensive community-driven process to create a strategic roadmap that addresses the needs of both visitors and residents.

In the fall of 2023, MMGY NextFactor will be working again with Visit Mesa and its Board of Directors to develop the organization's new 3-year strategic plan. That will include initiatives to support the implementation of the destination master plan.

AUG
2022

1. PROJECT PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

Define project plan and stakeholder engagement

SEP-OCT
2022

2. DESTINATION ASSESSMENT

Analyze destination metrics, including marketing and visitor data

SEP-DEC
2022

3. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Engage industry and community leaders

JAN-MAR
2023

4. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Prepare a complete synthesis and analysis of key takeaways

APR
2023

5. VISIONING WORKSHOP

Confirm strategic goals and initiatives

MAY-AUG
2023

6. MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Write and ratify the destination master plan

AUG-OCT
2023

7. STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Update Visit Mesa's 3-year Strategic Plan



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The process to develop the Mesa Forward 2033 destination master plan included 10 focus groups with various industry and community segments, more than 30 one-on-one interviews, four resident town halls, and one resident sentiment survey distributed in English and Spanish.

The main objective of these discussions was to identify key opportunities and issues for the future of Mesa and its visitor economy. The conversations centered on increasing and diversifying visitor volumes and spending throughout the year, fostering collaboration between industry stakeholders and community leaders, and enhancing the overall destination experience for both residents and visitors.



10

Focus Groups



30+

Individual Interviews



4

Resident Town Halls



**Resident Sentiment
Survey
(English & Spanish)**

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Visitors to Mesa spent \$710.4 million in 2022, an increase of 17% over the prior year. Visitor spending exceeded its 2019 level by 17%, while visitor volume fell short of the pre-pandemic benchmark by 7%. The direct visitor spending impact of \$710.4 million generated a total economic impact of \$1.1 billion in Mesa in 2022.

This total economic impact sustained 7,767 jobs and generated \$81.1 million in state and local tax revenues in 2022.

In 2022, Mesa continued its recovery following the Covid pandemic. Direct visitor spending amounted to \$710.4 million with visitor volume totaling 4.3 million.

Visitor volume continued to build on its post-pandemic growth in 2022, increasing 6.4% over 2021, and falling just 7% short of 2019 levels.

Visitor spending in 2022 expanded 17% and exceeded 2019 levels by 17%. Of the \$710 million spent in Mesa, visitors spent \$244 million on lodging, including second homes and short-term rentals, 34% of all visitor spending.

Visitor spending on food and beverage accounted for \$187 million, 26% of each visitor's budget. At \$115 million, retail accounted for 16% of visitor spending. Visitor spending on transportation, including air and in-destination transportation was \$102 million, 14% of all spending. Visitors spent \$62 million on recreation and entertainment, 9% of visitor spending.

MESA VISITOR VOLUME AND SPENDING BY MARKET

Amounts in millions of visitors, \$ millions

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total visitors	4.5	4.7	3.4	4.1	4.3
Domestic	4.4	4.5	3.3	4.02	4.2
International	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1
Total visitor spending	\$577.7	\$609.8	\$470.6	\$605.2	\$710.4
Domestic	\$501.9	\$536.4	\$443.7	\$585.1	\$665.5
International	\$75.8	\$73.5	\$26.9	\$20.1	\$44.8

Source: Longwoods International, Tourism Economics

MESA VISITOR SPENDING

Amounts in \$ millions, 2022 percent change and percent recovered relative to 2019

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022 Growth	% relative to 2019
Total visitor spending	\$577.7	\$609.8	\$407.6	\$605.2	\$710.4	17.4%	116.5%
Lodging*	\$167.6	\$180.0	\$152.4	\$194.1	\$243.7	25.5%	135.4%
Food & beverage	\$159.0	\$167.0	\$128.7	\$167.1	\$187.5	12.2%	112.3%
Retail	\$110.3	\$116.4	\$85.8	\$103.0	\$114.6	11.3%	98.5%
Transportation**	\$87.1	\$90.6	\$66.7	\$87.4	\$102.2	16.9%	112.9%
Recreation	\$53.7	\$56.0	\$37.0	\$53.6	\$62.4	16.5%	111.4%

Source: Longwoods International, Tourism Economics

* Lodging includes second home spending

** Transportation includes both ground and air transportation

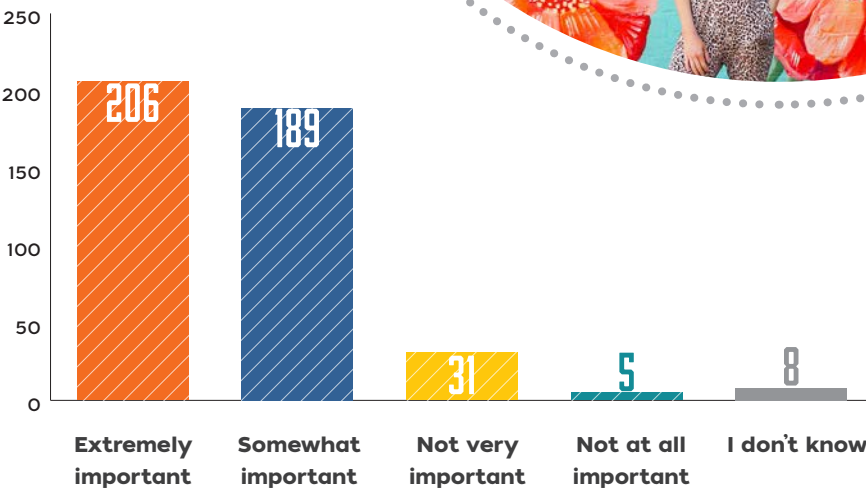
RESIDENT SENTIMENT SURVEY

Visit Mesa fielded an online survey in early 2023 to identify resident perceptions on a variety of key themes related to the visitor economy. To better serve the community, the survey was conducted in both Spanish and English. Within a span of three months, 640 Mesa residents participated in the survey.

The following survey data represents a sample of the overall results.

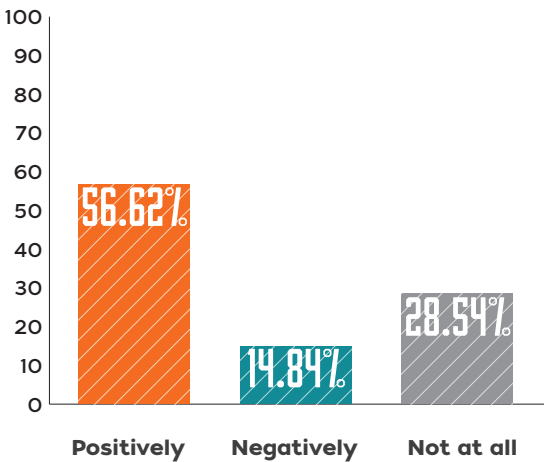
HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU BELIEVE TOURISM IS TO MESA?

The vast majority of Mesa residents understand the significant benefits that the visitor economy delivers for the community. That includes the revenue it generates for local businesses and the tax base it provides to pay for public infrastructure, amenities and services.



HOW WOULD YOU SAY MESA TOURISM IMPACTS YOUR LIFE AS A RESIDENT?

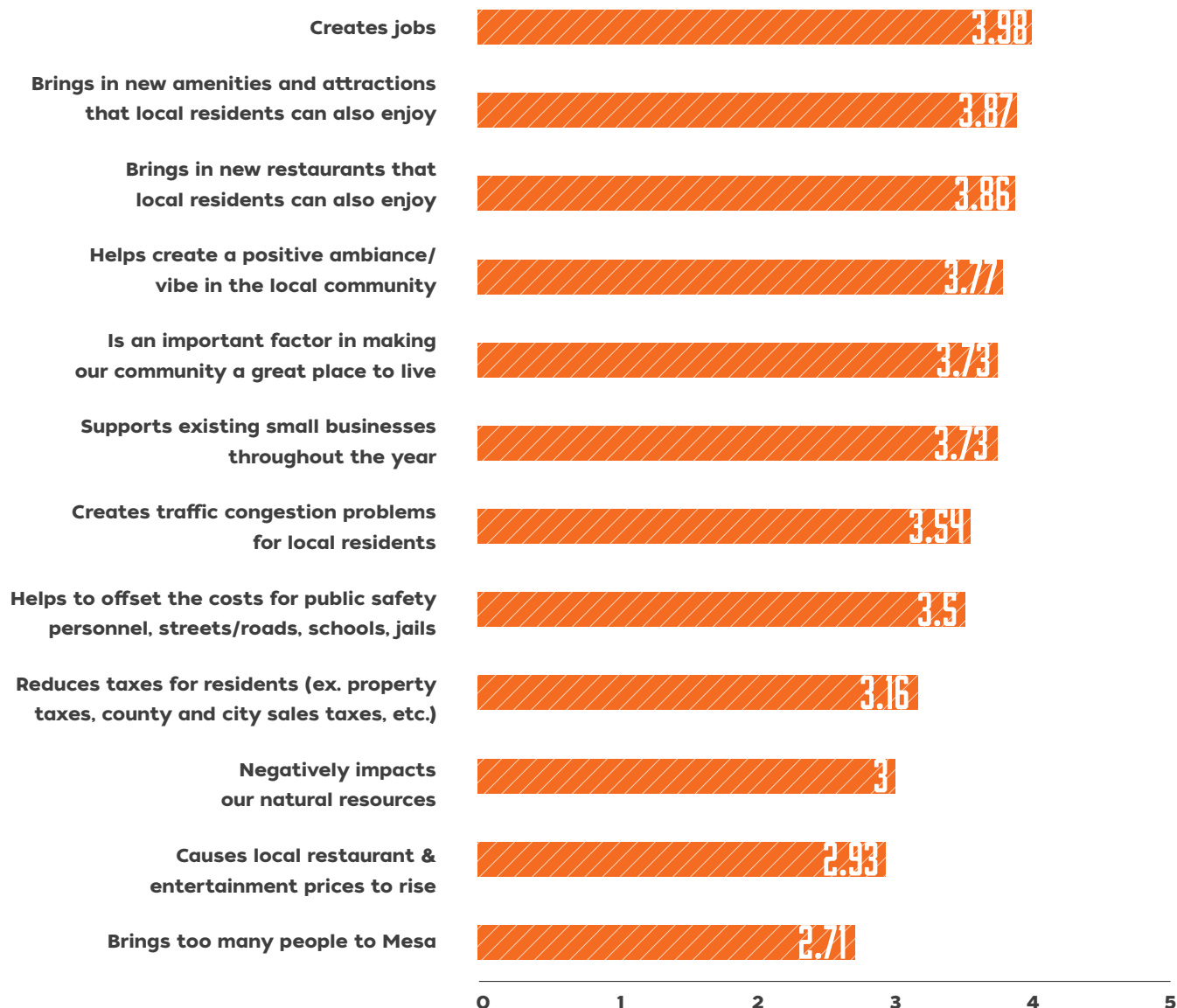
More than 50% of those surveyed believe that tourism has a positive impact on their lives. Based on that data, more needs to be done to educate residents about how visitor dollars benefit residents.





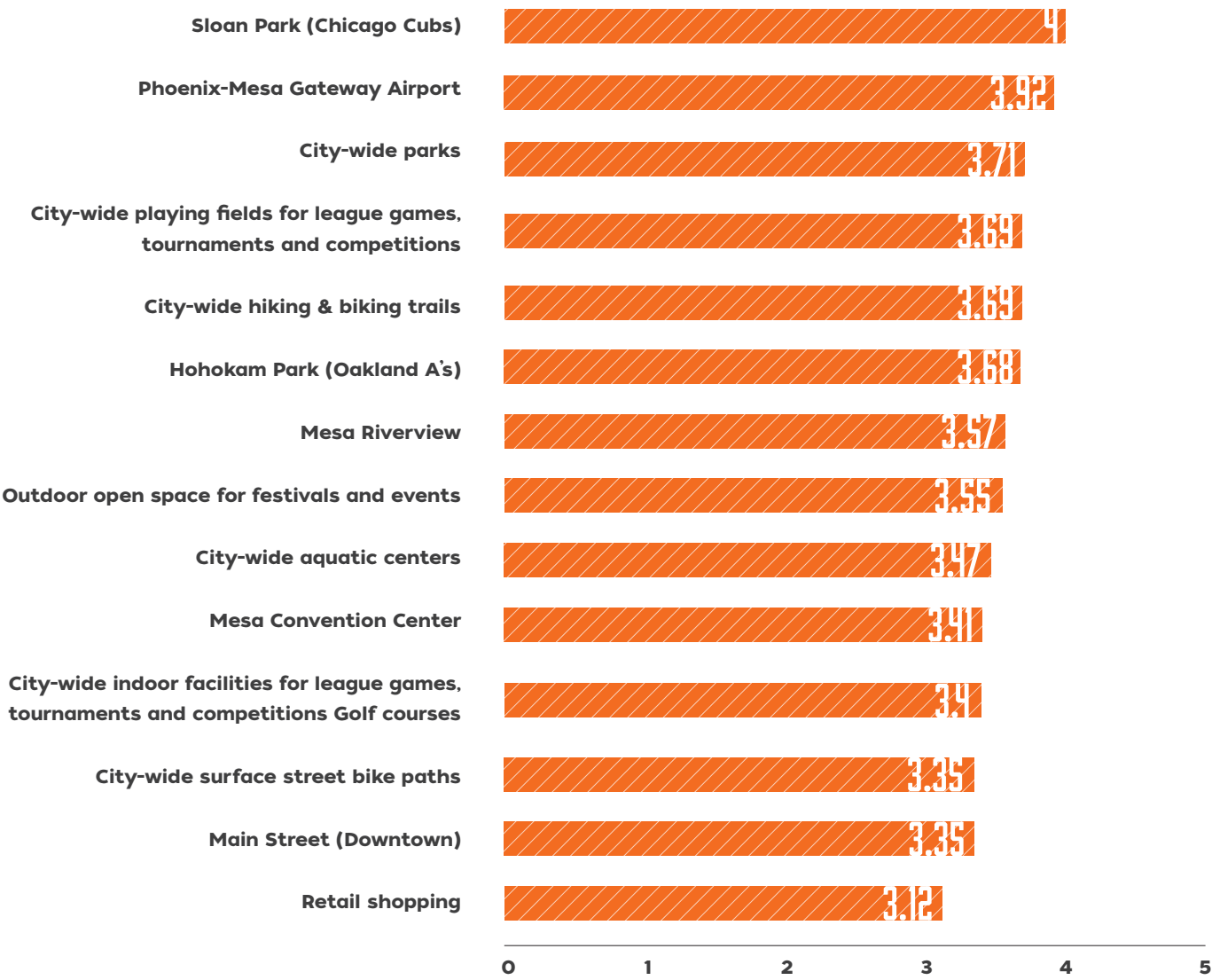
PLEASE INDICATE YOUR LEVEL OF AGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS AS IT RELATES TO TOURISM IN MESA

Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree.” The majority of residents indicated that they believe tourism in Mesa creates job opportunities, supports small businesses and provides amenities that have a positive impact on the community.



HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE ABILITY OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICES, PRODUCTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO SERVE THE RESIDENTS AND VISITORS OF MESA?

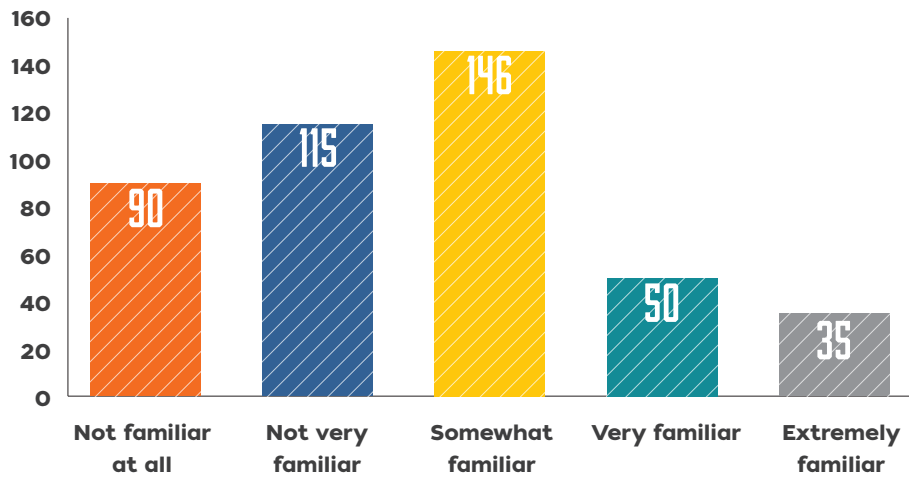
Participants were asked to rate various services, products and infrastructure on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “poor” and 5 being “excellent,” in terms of how they serve both residents and visitors of Mesa. The survey results reflected consistent calls for more amenities, infrastructure to improve transportation and a wide array of outdoor recreational options.





TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH VISIT MESA, THE LOCAL ORGANIZATION RESPONSIBLE FOR THE GROWTH OF TOURISM IN MESA?

Although residents acknowledge the advantages of tourism, there appears to be a lack of knowledge about Visit Mesa’s function and the role they play in growing and promoting the city’s tourism economy. According to the survey, nearly half of the respondents were either “not very familiar” or “not familiar at all” with the organization’s responsibilities.



10 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Following all the initial destination research, community engagement conversations and the resident survey, the collective insights were analyzed to develop the following key takeaways. These provided the necessary foundation for developing the final strategic framework for the destination master plan.

1 New developments in Mesa will transform the city into a major visitor destination in 10 years.

The volume of new residents and the growth of companies investing in Mesa are anticipated to continue based on growing national demand for the East Valley's cost of living, quality of life, advanced industry clusters, and community values. That will drive the development of amenities and experiences that are attractive for both residents and visitors.

2 Downtown Mesa is primed to emerge with vibrant scenes in food/beverage, arts/culture, film/music and tech/innovation.

Presently, there are active communities in Downtown Mesa who are passionate about many different types of lifestyle pursuits related to culinary and culture. Also, ASU at Mesa City Center is a state-of-the-art facility leading the future of media and communications. As Downtown Mesa achieves a critical mass of residents and students, the city core will transform into a major urban center in the Southwest.

3 Mesa has an opportunity to become a robust meetings, conference and convention city.

Mesa has two airports and a light rail system, which provide a distinct advantage for hosting meetings and conventions. If the region invests in new hotels and modern meeting facilities over the next decade, it will attract the all-important midweek, high-spending business traveler and conference attendee. The meetings visitor segment is crucial for the growth and success of small businesses downtown and throughout the East Valley.

4 Enhancing Mesa's visitor industry is key for attracting advanced industries.

Any company that ever invested in a city, and anyone who ever relocated to a new city, visited first. In effect, the visitor economy is the tip of the spear for community and economic development. As Mesa attracts more visitors, that means more companies and people are exposed to the city's investment opportunities and reasons for relocating.





5 There is a stark need for new full-service hotels throughout the East Valley.

Increasing hotel capacity for different visitor segments is one of the most critical needs for attracting more visitors across the region. During the community engagement to develop this plan, the theme of hotel capacity was one of the most consistent conversations. Almost every initiative in this plan will be more achievable with more diversified hotel inventory.

6 Sports tourism is a major competitive advantage for Mesa's visitor economy.

Mesa is, or soon will be, home to numerous world-class facilities for indoor and outdoor sporting events. Sports tourism is one of the fastest growing segments in the travel industry today, and Mesa is exceedingly well positioned to capitalize on this market.

7 Outdoor recreation is a major opportunity for Mesa.

The mountains, desert and Salt River ecosystem is staggeringly beautiful but there are limited options for visitors and locals to experience the outdoor majesty. Sustainable small business development in outdoor recreation will bring a greater variety to the visitor experience in Mesa and help increase average length of stay.

8 The lack of transportation options across the East Valley needs to be addressed.

The sheer size of Mesa and its sister cities present challenges for both visitors and locals to experience the full scope of the destination. Enhancing mobility within the region will support long-term economic and community development for all communities.

9 Workforce shortages are a major challenge for local business owners and managers.

Growing Mesa's visitor economy requires increasing the local workforce to effectively service the demand. That will require all stakeholders in the city to work together on industry advocacy and workforce development initiatives.

10 Pride, friendliness and commitment to inclusivity and accessibility are major assets for Mesa.

Overall, there is a strong inclusive attitude in Mesa where local residents and organizations welcome a diverse spectrum of people from all backgrounds in life, across all ages, and among all physical and cognitive abilities. That attitude is central to growing Mesa's visitor economy and enhancing local quality of life.



MESA FORWARD 2033 VISION

The Mesa Forward 2033 Vision is specific to this plan. It provides a high-level direction for the future of Mesa's visitor economy based on the collective input from a diverse spectrum of community leaders, travel industry stakeholders and residents.

The following Vision is a desired future state for Mesa. It is not a marketing statement. Rather, it's a due north for people in Mesa to come together and collaboratively implement the initiatives in the plan.

To develop the Vision, three unique destination signatures emerged during all the community engagement across Mesa and the East Valley:

**AN AMBITIOUS CITY EXPLORING ITS FUTURE
AND FULL POTENTIAL**

A FRIENDLY, CREATIVE AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY

**INTEGRATED URBAN AND RURAL EXPERIENCES
IN CLOSE PROXIMITY**

**From those three signatures, the following Vision for
Mesa Forward 2033 is:**

////////////////////////////////////
**MESA IS GLOBALLY RECOGNIZED
AS A WELCOMING, INNOVATIVE,
ACCESSIBLE AND EXPERIENCE-RICH
DESTINATION WITH LIMITLESS
OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE.**
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STRATEGIC GOALS & INITIATIVES

The strategic framework for the Mesa Forward 2033 destination master plan consists of five overarching strategic goals and numerous actionable initiatives for each. The goals and initiatives have been developed based entirely on what public officials, industry leaders and residents stated are important to them during a full year of extensive community engagement.

Visit Mesa's specific level of participation in implementing Mesa Forward 2033 initiatives varies depending on resources, responsibilities and expertise. Those levels are defined by this "LEIF" model:

L LEAD/CO-LEAD

E ENABLE

I INFLUENCE

F FOLLOW

Typically with a 10-year destination master plan, the high-level strategic goals remain consistent, although they should be reviewed around the 5-year mark. Meanwhile, the actionable initiatives under each goal are fluid. They should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. Establishing that flow chart to manage execution and track successes ensures that this plan remains a living document that responds to local changes in the community and the visitor industry marketplace.

Some of the actionable initiatives in the plan are short-term, while others will take years to accomplish. Visit Mesa, based on its resources, will have various levels of engagement to move this plan forward. For some of the initiatives, the organization will lead or co-lead them, or it can enable and support other organizations with different but aligned mandates. For other initiatives, Visit Mesa should have a seat at the table to provide input and help influence direction and outcomes (see "LEIF" model, left).

Altogether, the successful implementation of all the initiatives in this plan depends on local community and industry champions taking on specific action items and building coalitions to execute strategies effectively.

The five strategic goals for Mesa Forward 2033 are:

- 1 DEVELOP DOWNTOWN MESA INTO A CREATIVE, CULTURAL INNOVATION DISTRICT**
- 2 DEVELOP MORE DYNAMIC EVENTS**
- 3 DEVELOP VISITOR INDUSTRY CLUSTERS THROUGHOUT THE REGION**
- 4 ESTABLISH MESA AS A LEADING SPORTS TOURISM AND OUTDOOR RECREATION CAPITAL**
- 5 INCREASE INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY ALIGNMENT**

STRATEGIC GOAL #1

Develop Downtown Mesa Into a Creative, Cultural Innovation District

The growth of Downtown Mesa has accelerated in recent years based on the City of Mesa's vision and master planning initiatives, including the Mesa 2040 General Plan and the Central Main Street Area Plan. The increasing volume of new businesses and new residential housing units coming online is capitalizing on all the strong existing infrastructure: Valley Metro Rail, ASU at Mesa City Center, the impressive collection of cultural venues, and the historic Main Street appeal, etc. Together, those assets are redefining the identity and quality of life for Mesa's core.

The ASU campus, which will expand during the next decade, and all the impressive cultural venues surrounding it, present an organically-forming, cultural innovation district. Downtown Mesa, therefore, can be positioned as a magnet for creative and independent businesses, which all benefit from others in related industries located together in close proximity.

All that ongoing community, economic and destination development is also increasing and diversifying the scope of amenities to attract more visitors. In turn, more visitor dollars support the growth and viability of businesses operating in Downtown Mesa.

Looking long-term, more modern full-service hotels and meeting facilities are critical for Mesa's future to attract higher-spending leisure visitors, business travelers and conference attendees. The latter is important for local businesses during midweek. Large meetings and conferences, which typically run from Sunday through Thursday, drive higher revenues to many local businesses when they need it most.

DOWNTOWN MESA CAN BE POSITIONED AS A MAGNET FOR CREATIVE AND INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES.

The intent is not to compete head-on with Downtown Phoenix for large conventions. The goal is to attract smaller, midsize

conferences, including those in advanced industries. Mesa is home to a growing number of high-tech companies who say they presently have limited options about where to host conferences in Mesa.

Main Street also presents unique opportunities for Mesa's brand. The preservation of historic architecture, low building heights, abundance of locally-owned small businesses, and light rail service differentiate the Downtown Mesa experience and vibe against many other urban cores. The City of Mesa has been intentionally stewarding the development of Downtown to protect and elevate the urban landscape by maintaining its human scale, culture and heritage, and spirit of independent entrepreneurship.



STRATEGIC GOAL #1 • ACTIONABLE INITIATIVES

Develop Downtown Mesa Into a Creative, Cultural Innovation District

////////////////////////////////////

- a) Develop an integrated Convention Center District with a modern convention center and nearby full-service hotels**
- b) Beautify/brand Main Street and enhance mobility and placemaking:**
 - i. Increase investments in local public art, and develop more parks and green spaces
 - ii. Create an official mural district
 - iii. Establish welcome signage and/or distinct landmarks signaling arrival into downtown
 - iv. Expand parking options that also incentivize walkability and public transit use
 - v. Invest in electric mobility options
- c) Increase and diversify programming and partnerships downtown related to food and beverage; arts, culture & heritage; film and music; and innovation**
- d) Expand awareness of support opportunities for small business development**
- e) Increase collaboration with Indigenous groups**
- f) Continue to attract development in the Asian District (although not officially part of Downtown Mesa) to supplement Mesa's overall urban visitor experience and celebrate the city's diversity**



STRATEGIC GOAL #2

Develop More Dynamic Events

Special events are among the most proven and productive ways to drive visitor volumes during need periods. They also elevate a city's identity, brand and reputation on an international scale. Events are like billboards for a city. They provide a platform for marketing and messaging that both locals and visitors share with their networks. They raise community spirit and civic pride. They attract potential outside investors and new residents. And, they connect local businesses and organizations to explore new relationships and revenue-building opportunities.

Having two large airports servicing the city, Mesa is in a prime location to draw event goers from across the country. However, developing new events in the short- to mid-term will require a considerable amount of

new hotel inventory as well. First and foremost, this specific goal in the plan requires long-term strategic thinking to develop needed hotel room capacity.

MESA IS IN A PRIME LOCATION TO DRAW EVENT GOERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

Also, community and industry stakeholders support the idea of developing a signature event that capitalizes on the region's local culture, creativity and innovation. ASU and other anchor institutions are eager to support such an endeavor to raise the profile of Mesa and the highly varied local talent in the area's creative and advanced industries.

Stakeholders proposed suggestions for a signature event that emphasize community, collaboration, creativity, culinary, culture and communication. Many stakeholders identified SXSW in Austin, TX as a model. It is critical for such an event to promote inclusivity and accessibility as well to help highlight Mesa's cultural DNA and community values. ASU's expertise in developing how society communicates in the future can provide a foundation for innovative programming and sponsor development. That will provide a platform for how area businesses and organizations showcase their products, services, talent and networks.

Lastly, as one of the fastest growing cities in America, there is a point where the population's critical mass will warrant the development of a new midsize arena for concerts and other special events. This will require a feasibility study during the next five years to validate such a project.



Develop More Dynamic Events

- a) Create a Mesa development advisory committee made up of public, private and civic sector leaders across the East Valley to address event development, as well as other initiatives that benefit visitors and residents
- b) Create a signature annual event for the East Valley centered around modern, global themes related to collaboration, connectivity, creativity, inclusivity, accessibility and innovation (e.g., SXSW, C2)
- c) Develop an arena for concerts and special events
- d) Develop and promote year-round events
- e) Establish and market a summer nightlife event series



STRATEGIC GOAL #3

Develop Visitor Industry Clusters Throughout The Region

Northeast and Southeast Mesa both have opportunities to grow their interregional visitor economies based on their unique urban and natural landscapes. A key objective for this destination master plan is to diversify visitor volumes and spending in community clusters along the perimeter of Mesa. For Mesa to fully capitalize on its potential as a nationally recognized destination for leisure, sports and meetings, all of Mesa needs to be involved to present visitors with one holistic package.

With its close proximity to the Salt River and mountains, Northeast Mesa is a prime location for a large, high-quality standalone resort that caters to all visitor segments, including family, leisure, sports and meetings. Previous to the Covid pandemic, there had been developer interest to build such a property. An anchor hotel for the region of significant enough scope will also act as a catalyst for ancillary small business development in the area, both within the tourism

NORTHEAST MESA IS A PRIME LOCATION FOR A LARGE STANDALONE RESORT THAT CATERES TO ALL VISITOR SEGMENTS.

industry and beyond. There are many case studies across the Southwest where one substantial resort-hotel can have an outsized impact on a community's economic and social vibrancy.

Likewise, Southeast Mesa is quickly expanding with the ongoing development of Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport. The long-term air service development opportunities for the region cannot be overestimated if Mesa continues to grow as anticipated. Equally, the airport is a magnet for attracting tech, mobility and logistics industries, further supported by the future expansion of nearby ASU Polytechnic.

Based on that increasing aggregation of talent and investment, Southeast Mesa needs to have more full-service hotels in the upper upscale category. The lack of hotel capacity is arguably the most significant challenge for the area, similar to Downtown Mesa.

Lastly, there was considerable stakeholder and resident input during the development of this plan that it's a challenge for people to access the entire East Valley due to its size and spread. Many people emphasized the need to expand light rail service eastward to Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport.

Clearly, this is a massive capital expenditure, and the time frame for actually building that rail link exceeds the scope of this plan. However, there was considerable agreement that there should be advocacy efforts and continued conversation in the next decade to better define the benefits for connecting the entire East Valley for both locals and visitors.



Develop Visitor Industry Clusters Throughout The Region

- a) Create the necessary economic environment for attracting private investment to develop an upscale, full-service signature hotel with comprehensive leisure amenities, family activities and meeting facilities in Northeast Mesa
- b) Encourage investment in more full-service hotels and more diverse amenities around Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport and Southeast Mesa
- c) Expand vehicle and light rail transportation infrastructure to better connect the region
- d) Develop new map-based content and comprehensive calendars to help disperse visitors across Mesa year-round



STRATEGIC GOAL #4

Establish Mesa as a Leading Sports Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Capital

Sports tourism and outdoor recreation are two of the fastest growing segments in the national visitor economy coming out of the Covid pandemic. Mesa is incredibly well positioned to capitalize on both markets based on the region's wide variety of existing assets, excellent air access and year-round mild weather. These are also markets where Mesa can increase competitive advantage by integrating higher levels of inclusivity and accessibility into overall product development.

Mesa's sports tourism product, including Legacy Park, Cannon Beach, Hohokam Park and Sloan Park, among others, is world-class. That represents a significant differentiator for the region's visitor economy. The city is still under the radar nationally as a visitor destination, so it is critical for the public, private and civic sectors to continually support these facilities to ensure their long-term viability. Part of that includes expanding road access to Legacy Park and Cannon Beach.

THERE NEEDS TO BE INCREASED FUNDS FOR MARKETING MESA AS A SPORTS TOURISM DESTINATION.

There also needs to be increased funds for marketing Mesa as a sports tourism destination. "If you build it, they will come" is definitely not a fact in the travel industry, overall. Mesa

is ahead of the curve in terms of developing sports tourism facilities, but they require aggressive sales and marketing to fill them on a year-round basis.

In line with that, industry stakeholders have suggested creating an East Valley Sports Alliance between Mesa, Chandler, Tempe, Gilbert and Scottsdale. Such an alliance could potentially help coordinate efforts, share resources, and lead to the creation of a unique and dynamic inter-regional sports tourism ecosystem.

Regarding outdoor recreation, the federal government's restrictions on the Salt Lake River area have been a source of frustration for those looking to access and develop the area. Greater advocacy efforts will help bring attention to the issue around permitting and potentially lead to changes in policy. Engaging with local representatives and policymakers, as well as building partnerships with environmental organizations, small business owners and tribal leadership will be helpful in this regard.

Long-term, there needs to be more collaborative business and infrastructure development to provide locals and visitors with more things to do, in general. Based on stakeholder input, the demand is there. People want to spend money in Mesa's great outdoors but they're challenged about how to spend it. Increasing capacity in outdoor recreation also increases average length of stay for both leisure and business travelers.



STRATEGIC GOAL #4 • ACTIONABLE INITIATIVES

Establish Mesa as a Leading Sports Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Capital

- a) Promote continued investment in indoor and outdoor sports facilities**
- b) Expand road access to Legacy Park and Cannon Beach**
- c) Increase funding to promote and sell Mesa's sports tourism assets**
- d) Establish partnerships with neighboring communities to optimize the sports tourism market**
- e) Develop additional infrastructure and services for visitors and residents to enjoy the Salt River and other outdoor recreation areas**
- f) Provide small business grants to accelerate entrepreneurial growth in outdoor tours and activities, and related culinary/cultural experiences**



STRATEGIC GOAL #5

Increase Industry and Community Alignment

The City of Mesa, Visit Mesa, and an impressive scope of community organizations and business owners have a strong willingness to work together for the benefit of all residents. This is not the norm in many cities, and Mesa is fortunate to have that spirit of collaboration. Based on all the new developments in the city, there is a palpable sense of civic pride, but at the same time, many residents and visitors are unaware of the incredible opportunities for Mesa as a place to live, work, visit and learn in the next 10 years.

Ultimately, in the minds of travelers, the identity of a destination and its brand reputation are based on the people living there. The values of the community and what inspires them is manifested in the experiences that visitors enjoy and purchase. For Mesa to achieve its full potential in the coming decades, the local population must buy into the vision, initiatives and intended outcomes proposed in this plan.

Therefore, it is recommended that a steering committee made up of public, private and civic sector leaders be formed to steward the implementation of Mesa Forward 2033, including members of the plan's existing subcommittee.

As well, local stakeholders recommended the creation of a Resident Advisory Panel to ensure the voice of the community is heard in decision making relevant to Mesa's visitor economy. Stakeholders also suggested partnering with existing organizations like For the Love of Mesa to increase collaboration and maintain the momentum established during the process to develop this destination master plan.

THE IDENTITY OF A DESTINATION AND ITS BRAND REPUTATION ARE BASED ON THE PEOPLE LIVING THERE.

Strong public-private partnerships are critical for tackling big themes related to sustainability; accessibility; and diversity, equity and inclusion. These topics were all addressed during the

community engagement in the past year. However, they will require much further discussion across all segments of the community to continue developing strategies and tactics, implementing them collaboratively, and tracking shared successes.

Every goal and initiative in Mesa Forward 2023 relies on continually increasing industry and community alignment. This is arguably the most important role for Visit Mesa, in terms of bringing people together.



Increase Industry and Community Alignment

- a) **Maintain a Mesa Forward 2033 Steering Committee to steward the ongoing implementation of the destination master plan's strategic framework**
- b) **Ensure sustainable, long-term funding for Visit Mesa**
- c) **Increase support for the “For the Love of Mesa” resident ambassador program**
- d) **Improve accessibility for people of all abilities in collaboration with local, regional and national partners; Develop a Universal Design Hotel to host people of all abilities**
- e) **Expand public-private partnerships to improve sustainability and resilience in urban and rural areas**
- f) **Increase support for hospitality workforce development initiatives at the local, regional and state levels; Increase advocacy for travel and tourism as a career path with unlimited personal and professional development opportunities**
- g) **Enhance service education for front-line workers in the hospitality, tourism and transportation sectors**



An aerial photograph of a large sports complex during sunset. The sky is filled with vibrant orange, pink, and purple clouds. In the foreground, several soccer fields with green artificial turf are visible, each with white field markings and goals. The fields are illuminated by tall stadium lights. To the right of the soccer fields, there are basketball courts with blue and green surfaces, and a large, modern building with a white roof. A parking lot filled with cars is situated between the soccer fields and the basketball courts. In the background, a wide river flows through a desert landscape, with mountains visible on the horizon. The overall scene is a mix of modern sports infrastructure and natural desert beauty.

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