



# COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLANNING MINUTES

February 19, 2026

The City Council of the City of Mesa met in a Strategic Planning Session at The Post, 26 North Macdonald, on February 19, 2025, at 8:00 a.m.

## COUNCIL PRESENT

Mark Freeman  
Scott Somers  
Rich Adams  
Jennifer Duff  
Alicia Goforth  
Francisco Heredia  
Dorean Taylor

## COUNCIL ABSENT

None

## OFFICERS PRESENT

Scott Butler  
Holly Moseley  
Jim Smith

### 1. Mayor's welcome.

Mayor Freeman conducted a roll call and welcomed the Council and staff.

Mayor Freeman encouraged open discussion and honest feedback to develop practical solutions that will support the City's long-term success. He emphasized maintaining focus on key priorities and the City of Mesa's (COM) organizational heritage while continuing to innovate, promote economic prosperity, and provide residents with opportunities to live, work, play, and learn in Mesa.

### 2. Review the purpose of the Strategic Planning Session.

City Manager Scott Butler commented that the purpose of the meeting was to focus on Council priorities, particularly within individual districts. He noted the importance of working collaboratively to clearly understand the Council's goals and to develop a shared vision and clear direction moving forward. He pointed out that while much work occurs behind the scenes, it is important that staff report back to the Council to ensure established priorities are translating into day-to-day operations and advancing the COM's overall vision.

Mr. Butler introduced Jenn Daniels, Founder and CEO of AZP Consulting, and Megan Schmitz, Principal of Northland Strategies, as the moderators for the planning session. He expressed appreciation to HighGround, Inc. for gathering information and listening to residents' feedback, which will assist the COM better understand bond issues, other community challenges, and concerns of residents.

Ms. Daniels referred to the COM General Plan and identified the document as the foundation for the Strategic Plan. She explained that the session would focus on establishing a long-term strategic framework, which would later guide the development of an action plan.

3-a. Hear a presentation and discuss the results of a community survey conducted by Highground , Public Affairs Consultant group.

Ms. Daniels introduced Paul Bentz, Senior Vice President of Research & Strategy at HighGround Inc., and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 1)**

Mr. Bentz explained that the purpose of the survey was to provide objective data reflecting what residents are focused on and the results are unbiased. He reported that two separate surveys were conducted, each with a sample size of 500 completed interviews, which he described as the gold standard to yield a low margin of error. He noted that obtaining 500 completed interviews requires outreach to a larger pool of individuals to ensure appropriate demographic representation across age, gender, and race. (See Pages 2 and 3 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Bentz reported that the survey sample reflected a population trending older, with approximately 60% of respondents over the age of 50 and noted that representation across council districts was evenly distributed with several hundred respondents from each district to ensure geographic balance. He verified that the data was weighted to reflect the anticipated audience and overall community demographics. He added that most respondents did not have children living at home and that many do not consistently vote in every election due to other commitments, identifying them as less likely voters. He said that the survey audience tended to be approximately 10 points more conservative, and adjustments were made to ensure the results accurately represent the community. (See Pages 4 and 5 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Bentz remarked that while 35 to 40% of respondents believe the country is headed in the right direction and 40 to 45% feel the same about the state, approximately 62% believe Mesa is moving in the right direction, with most responses generally in the 50 to 55% range. He indicated that there was a strong sense of local optimism and stated that Mesa's local government is viewed more favorably than in many other cities, with broad support across age groups. (See Page 6 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Bentz reviewed the top issues identified by respondents, including housing affordability and inflation, which have shifted over time as costs have increased, along with gas prices, homelessness, traffic congestion, and public safety. He reported that approximately three-quarters of the electorate believe the Mayor and Council are doing a good job, with ratings trending upward since March, but with continued opportunity for improvement through increased community engagement. He supplied data that residents age 65 and older represent a significant portion of the electorate and often receive news from national or cable sources rather than local outlets, which typically leads them to be more pessimistic; however, this age group indicated an excellent local government rating for Mesa. (See Pages 7 and 8 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Bentz discussed the service ratings and stated that most COM services were rated positively; however, areas such as community transportation and streets received scores below 3.0, which is common in growing cities where maintaining infrastructure and connectivity can be challenging. He added that the public safety services received strong ratings, with the Fire Department scoring higher than Police, which he attributed to the nature of the services they provide. (See Page 9 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Bentz reported that 56% of respondents believe the amount of taxes they pay is about right, while only 4% feel taxes are too low. He highlighted that the COM does not levy a primary property tax; however, many residents are unaware of this, as 54% initially indicated they pay a primary property tax and 38% maintained that response when asked further. He stressed that

this reflects an opportunity for public education, particularly regarding where taxes are paid and how funds are allocated. He added that while older residents were more likely to answer correctly, confusion remains, underscoring the importance of clear and consistent communication rather than assuming residents are informed. (See Pages 10 and 11 of Attachment 1)

Mr. Bentz stated that regarding policy priorities previously identified by the Council, random polling was conducted to avoid bias and gauge overall community sentiment, using a scale of 1 to 5. He said all listed priorities scored above 3.5, with varying degrees of importance. He explained that transparency received the highest rating, followed by reducing crime, water conservation, and job creation and that while jobs were previously the dominant issue, Mesa's growth and regional maturity have shifted community focus to other concerns. He stated that these findings help identify citywide priorities and messaging opportunities. He supplied results that indicated that most respondents prefer receiving information through email newsletters and other written formats, with older residents continuing to rely on written communication. He reiterated that the findings were consistent across both surveys conducted. (See Pages 12 and 13 of Attachment 1)

In response to Councilmember Duff's comment regarding protecting taxpayers as a policy priority, Mr. Bentz stated that residents often respond more favorably to broader language such as transparency and accountability measures. He noted that the concept was not generally interpreted as addressing fraud or crime, but rather as ensuring openness and responsible governance.

Responding to an inquiry from Councilmember Taylor, Ms. Daniels pointed out that while district-level data can be compiled, it would be based on a smaller sample size and therefore would not be as statistically reliable as the citywide results.

Mr. Bentz added that the district breakdown would provide relative insights into priorities and areas of greatest interest, though it may not reflect definitive conclusions. He confirmed that the information would be provided.

Councilmember Adams requested clarification regarding the rating of protecting taxpayers as a policy priority, specifically whether the wording was intentionally general or accompanied by additional context.

Mr. Bentz responded that the phrase was intentionally broad and not tied to specific examples, explaining that the survey avoided drilling down into narrowly defined language to measure overall sentiment. He added that when compared, wording focused on transparency and accountability performed better than the phrase "protect taxpayers."

In response to a question from Mayor Freeman, Mr. Bentz confirmed that the polling tested individual bond elements rather than a single overall amount and he noted that public safety, streets, and other community-focused projects generally received positive support.

Mr. Butler commented that the survey results regarding residents' understanding of property taxes were sobering and underscored the need for clearer communication. He stated that the Public Information Office would assist with messaging efforts and noted that much of the responsibility also falls to Councilmembers when speaking with community groups, as residents look to them as the face of the COM.

3-b. Hear a presentation and discuss the Mayor's *Elevate Mesa* vision.

Mayor Freeman provided an overview of the Elevate Mesa vision and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 2)**

Mayor Freeman explained that the Elevate Mesa vision would raise standards across all departments. He noted the importance of the Council working collaboratively and establishing a clear timeline to guide the COM's continued growth, grounded in community input. He emphasized that Mesa is a full-service city, providing nearly every municipal service, and that measuring success requires reliable data to determine what is needed to move forward. He called for greater transparency and coordination across departments, avoiding siloed operations, and being intentional with fiscal decisions. (See Pages 3 and 4 of Attachment 2)

Mayor Freeman suggested refining the COM's strategic pillars to four or five key focus areas to better align departments and priorities. He highlighted public safety, innovation, and strong neighborhoods as core strengths, and stressed the importance of maintaining high standards and reinvesting in the community. He pointed out that with limited land remaining for development, quality growth must be strategic and supported by infrastructure, ensuring new development contributes positively and addresses areas that have underperformed. He discussed the importance of long-range planning, reinvestment, redevelopment across all districts, and cross-departmental coordination to maximize economic development opportunities. (See Pages 5 and 6 of Attachment 2)

Mayor Freeman emphasized the need for balance among housing types, ensuring the right mix in appropriate locations with supporting infrastructure and services. He noted that single-family housing provides stability and that thoughtful planning is essential in an older city experiencing change to meet the distinct needs of each district. He stated that Mesa is performing well in water management and highlighted the COM's reuse infrastructure in central Mesa and the agreement with the Gila River Indian Community that have been developed to support long-term stewardship. He emphasized the importance of keeping infrastructure investments aligned with growth to avoid higher costs in the future and noted that capacity growth fees are an important tool to ensure new development helps cover these costs rather than shifting the burden to existing residents. He added that these efforts support the goal of elevating Mesa while maintaining long-term fiscal responsibility. (See Pages 7 and 8 of Attachment 2)

Mayor Freeman identified safe and innovative communities as a priority, noting that public safety is fundamental to maintaining safe neighborhoods, streets, and public trust. He emphasized the importance of transparency and accountability, and using data to guide decision-making that strengthens neighborhoods and supports police and fire services. He stated that as the COM grows, it is important to take responsibility for how density is planned in certain areas to ensure appropriate public safety response times. He also highlighted education and workforce development as essential to the community's long-term success and noted the importance of partnering with local education systems to align education with Mesa's growing economic sectors. He confirmed that the goal is to build a strong workforce pipeline that prepares residents for local job opportunities and supports businesses operating in Mesa. He added that while the Council does not oversee school operations, collaboration with educational partners is important to ensure workforce readiness, strengthen neighborhoods, and support Mesa's continued transformation from a bedroom community into a vibrant economic center. (See Pages 9 and 10 of Attachment 2)

Mayor Freeman reiterated that strong neighborhoods depend on clear standards, reinvestment, and effective code enforcement to protect property values and quality of life. He pointed out that limited resources should be used strategically where they can have the greatest impact and

stressed the importance of proactive engagement, public education and technology to better serve residents. He commented that transparent government involves clear planning, priorities, and budgeting so residents understand decisions and trade-offs, while maintaining core services and pursuing innovation in a fiscally responsible manner. (See Pages 11 and 12 of Attachment 2)

Mayor Freeman voiced that a priority filter is necessary to ensure the COM focuses on strategic initiatives, noting that not every good idea is necessarily strategic. He emphasized the importance of delivering measurable and timely outcomes, aligning efforts among the Council, staff, and the community, and ensuring departments work collaboratively rather than in silos. He stated that the Elevate Mesa approach requires discipline in decision-making and is intended to protect the COM while positioning it for long-term success. He expressed pride in the COM's use of data and metrics, noting that Mesa compares favorably with neighboring cities and maintains one of the lowest costs of living in the region. He mentioned the importance of Council collaboration, transparency, compromise, a more focused set of strategic pillars, and supporting the City Manager's effective operation. (See Pages 13 through 15 of Attachment 2)

Councilmember Duff commented that the presentation provided a comprehensive overview and suggested developing simple language that the community could easily understand and associate with the Elevate Mesa concept.

Mayor Freeman announced the importance of positioning Mesa competitively among municipalities in the Valley and across the state, noting that Mesa is a strong economic player and that messaging should reflect the COM's competitiveness and desire to succeed. He suggested developing concise wording that captures those ideas.

Mr. Butler added that the concept of Elevate Mesa represents a commitment to avoid complacency and ensure the COM continues to operate efficiently. He voiced that the COM must continually improve and remain competitive with other cities nationally and regionally and emphasized the importance of jobs and maintaining the values that have made Mesa successful.

Councilmember Goforth expressed support for reducing the number of strategic pillars to four, noting that focusing on quality over quantity would make priorities clearer and more relatable for the public. She added that Mesa provides core services such as utilities, public safety, and streets at a very high level and that the City should continue to focus on future needs and long-term planning rather than reacting to issues.

Councilmember Heredia suggested beginning presentations with information about Mesa's population, size, and scale of operations to help residents understand the scope of the City's work. He noted that Mesa has a \$2.7 billion budget, covers approximately 140 square miles, and is the 36th largest city in the country, which can help provide context for the services and projects discussed.

Councilmember Taylor suggested polling the residents to understand their priorities before narrowing down the priorities to four pillars. She noted that government transparency ranked highly in the survey and suggested that Council consider resident input when determining strategic priorities.

Mayor Freeman responded that such data could help strengthen the pillars, though some external factors affecting outcomes may be beyond the City's control.

Councilmember Taylor added that while the COM cannot control all external factors, the survey data helps identify residents' priorities. She emphasized considering these priorities when implementing the General Plan and highlighted the importance of balancing the perspectives of older residents, younger families, and newly retired individuals when shaping policies.

Mayor Freeman recalled that economic growth and development are key to attracting and retaining employees and residents. He noted the importance of providing appropriate housing options and working with the development community to determine the right housing types for different areas of the city.

3-c. Hear presentations from each Council Member regarding the vision, goals, and key priorities for their respective districts, followed by discussion.

Councilmember Adams presented the strategic priorities for District 1 and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 3)**

Councilmember Adams pointed out that the COM has a strong legacy as a family-oriented community built on ethics and values, and the future presents significant opportunities if managed well. He emphasized maintaining a can-do attitude toward businesses and residents, minimizing regulations where possible, and making it easier to establish businesses and pursue adaptive reuse of underutilized buildings. He encouraged proactive permitting and reconsidering regulatory hurdles that may discourage redevelopment. (See Page 2 of Attachment 3)

Councilmember Adams identified the strategic priorities for District 1 and emphasized the importance of managing smart growth and infill development to protect neighborhood character while supporting needed residential development. He highlighted homelessness as a multifaceted issue and suggested exploring innovative solutions and partnerships, rather than relying solely on taxpayer funding. He discussed supporting stable and livable neighborhoods by streamlining processes, encouraging homeownership, promoting neighborhood investment, and ensuring that development projects follow through on commitments made during the approval process. He voiced his desire to promote economic growth by ensuring Mesa is open for business, reducing unnecessary regulations, and using resources efficiently. (See Pages 3 through 5 of Attachment 3)

Councilmember Adams added that success would be defined by balanced policies that support growth, prosperity, and stability, along with strong partnerships and collaboration. He suggested taking a more business-oriented approach when budgeting by evaluating departmental outcomes and value delivered rather than applying across-the-board percentage reductions. He remarked that the COM should continue to improve code compliance by ensuring enforcement is fair and unbiased and expressed the importance of continuing to review land use and zoning regulations to accommodate emerging trends such as urban gardening and small-scale farming. (See Pages 6 and 7 of Attachment 3)

In response to a question from Mayor Freeman, Councilmember Adams identified infill development and adaptive reuse as key challenges in District 1 due to limited undeveloped land and the number of underutilized commercial properties. He emphasized balancing redevelopment opportunities with neighborhood character and reducing barriers that discourage property owners from pursuing redevelopment projects.

Discussion ensued related to the importance of flexibility in regulations, focusing on outcomes rather than rigid processes, and ensuring that policy direction and code provisions allow staff to apply reasonable flexibility when appropriate.

Additional discussion ensued regarding the importance of flexibility in regulations and focusing on outcomes rather than rigid processes.

Councilmember Taylor provided an overview of the strategic priorities for District 2 and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 4)**

Councilmember Taylor described District 2 as a mainly suburban area where residents are highly engaged and vocal about maintaining the community's family-oriented character. She explained that the residents value the suburban feel with nearby shopping and gathering spaces and want to see redevelopment that enhances that environment. She highlighted concerns about blighted property and public safety issues in several areas and pointed out that residents frequently ask about redevelopment options. (See Page 2 of Attachment 4)

Councilmember Taylor offered the strategic priorities for District 2 and emphasized redevelopment, particularly revitalizing aging shopping centers and underutilized properties with smaller retail, family-friendly spaces, and green areas. She highlighted the need for relevant infill development, such as neighborhood-serving businesses or medical offices, and noted concerns about deteriorating areas in the district. (See Page 3 of Attachment 4)

Councilmember Taylor stressed that successful revitalization would require partnerships among COM departments, property owners, developers, and residents, as well as a clearer framework and vision to guide investment. She suggested creating a replicable model for revitalization to elevate Mesa using District 2 as a pilot area to test redevelopment strategies that could later be applied in other parts of the city. She noted that while many residents value small-town character and prefer things to remain the same, continued growth is necessary to maintain a strong tax base and support future services. She emphasized the importance of attracting younger families to ensure that the community continues to evolve. She pointed out that thoughtful change can be positive for the city's long-term sustainability. (See Pages 4 and 5 of Attachment 4)

Responding to a question from Mayor Freeman, Councilmember Taylor highlighted Dana Park as a central hub for tourism, shopping, and dining, noting that it contributes to economic activity and reiterated the challenges in other areas in the district emphasizing the need to demonstrate to the community how adaptive reuse and infill development can revitalize underperforming properties and improve neighborhood amenities.

Councilmember Heredia reviewed the strategic priorities for District 3 and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 5)**

Councilmember Heredia noted that while District 3 shares many of the same themes discussed by other councilmembers it contains some of the COM's most densely populated and older infrastructure areas. He emphasized a vision focused on enhancing placemaking opportunities and encouraging strategic reinvestment while continuing the policy direction and momentum established by previous councils. He highlighted key redevelopment areas in District 3 and noted that the COM has already laid the groundwork through zoning and development partnerships and must now continue building on that foundation to create additional major regional assets. (See Page 2 of Attachment 5)

Councilmember Heredia identified District 3 strategic priorities and reiterated that redevelopment is a major theme across the COM, particularly in areas that are largely built out. He explained the need for continued planning and active development efforts to lay the groundwork for long-term economic growth, including supporting small businesses and creating places where

residents want to shop, dine, and gather. He emphasized the importance of keeping infrastructure improvements aligned with the City's growth and encouraged exploring better coordination and scheduling of street paving and redevelopment projects to minimize travel disruptions for residents. He highlighted the importance of parks, public safety, and the amenities residents rely on in their daily lives and noted that District 3 has strong potential for continued improvement and recreation opportunities. He encouraged evaluating neighborhood-level needs and identifying targeted enhancements to parks and other existing assets through thoughtful capital improvement planning to maintain a high quality of life for all COM residents. (See Pages 3 through 5 of Attachment 5)

Councilmember Heredia continued by recognizing the importance of partnerships and coordination, particularly with Development Services, which has helped establish the foundation for redevelopment efforts and made text amendments to the Code to allow more flexibility. He highlighted the value of local stakeholders and small businesses, noting their role in the long-term success of the community. (See Page 6 of Attachment 5)

Councilmember Heredia added that District 3 will continue to elevate Mesa by strengthening its identity as a destination community and making the COM a place where people can live, work, and play.

In response to a question from Mayor Freeman, Councilmember Heredia reiterated that quality infrastructure is essential to attracting quality development and noted the importance of establishing strong policies to build a modern infrastructure foundation. He added that while many of these infrastructure improvements occur behind the scenes, they play a critical role in supporting future growth and enabling successful development projects.

Additional discussion ensued regarding the history of the Asian District and the importance of investing in quality infrastructure and partnerships to create places that support micro ecosystems within the COM.

(A recess took place at 10:15 a.m. The Council Strategic Planning Session resumed at 10:28 a.m.)

Councilmember Duff outlined the strategic priorities for District 4 and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 6)**

Councilmember Duff noted that the district has evolved into a growing arts district with opportunities to expand further into the future. She discussed the opportunity to build on Arizona State University's (ASU) presence and expand to create an Arts and Innovation Corridor connected by a Light Walk corridor to link key downtown assets and strengthen connections between arts, innovation, and entrepreneurship. (See Page 2 of Attachment 6)

Councilmember Duff discussed her district priorities beginning with cultivating an Arts and Innovation Corridor and described the goal to establish a hub where art, technology, and entrepreneurship converge to support creativity, mentorship, venture capital access, and business growth while strengthening downtown Mesa's unique identity. She stated that the corridor could evolve into a major hub for employment and innovation, leveraging ASU's presence and educational pipeline to attract high-wage jobs and would promote economic development in the COM. She explained the benefits of renovating and integrating key facilities, including the convention center and amphitheater, and incorporating emerging technologies to create a nationally recognized destination for creative industries and professional opportunities. She voiced the desire for a people-first, multimodal downtown that supports walking, biking,

scooters, and other mobility options while improving parking coordination to strengthen connections within the downtown square mile and maximize transportation options. She recognized the need to renovate the Mesa Convention Center that currently serves one million customers per year, noting the desire to keep those same customers downtown to eat before or after an event. (See Pages 3 through 5 of Attachment 6)

Councilmember Duff confirmed that partnerships with ASU will be integral to downtown development, including supporting the museum and ASU's strategic planning efforts. She pointed out that while private developers are investing in downtown, the COM must also continue to invest as a partner to help guide and support the vision for the area. (See Page 6 of Attachment 6)

Councilmember Duff added that District 4 can elevate Mesa by creating a unified district that attracts young talent, increases investment, and expands economic opportunities. She described the corridor as a catalyst that can drive continued growth downtown and help elevate surrounding areas throughout the city. (See Page 7 of Attachment 6)

Discussion ensued regarding the facility renovations referenced in the presentation and the potential benefits of making those investments.

Councilmember Goforth supplied the strategic priorities for District 5 and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 7)**

Councilmember Goforth described District 5 as a highly engaged community where residents intentionally choose to live because of the area's character and strong neighborhood. She shared a vision focused on quality of life, including low crime, manageable traffic, well-maintained infrastructure, strong water quality, financial stability, and transparent governance. She also emphasized the importance of strengthening the COM's community identity to foster pride and encourage continued investment. (See Page 2 of Attachment 7)

Councilmember Goforth reiterated that public safety remains a top priority for District 5 residents. She noted that the COM has done an excellent job through innovative approaches and strong community partnerships and stressed the importance of continuing to prioritize safety. She recalled that residents would like to see a broader mix of development, including more unique shopping and dining options to complement existing large-scale retail and drive-thru establishments. She encouraged exploring ways to support smaller, local developers who are invested in the community. She stated that Falcon Field is at a pivotal point and that its long-term vision should support business aviation while balancing airport operations with nearby neighborhoods. She added that Falcon Field should serve as an anchor for employment, economic activity, and quality commercial development in areas such as Longbow. (See Pages 3 through 5 of Attachment 7)

Councilmember Goforth stressed that partnerships outside the COM are important and acknowledged that perceptions of Mesa can sometimes create barriers to attracting the type of development residents are seeking. (See Page 6 of Attachment 7)

Councilmember Goforth added that District 5 will help to elevate Mesa by raising development standards, strengthening the tax base, and building a city that supports long-term prosperity. She noted that economic development strategies have shifted, with jobs increasingly following talent; therefore, by creating a city where people want to live, Mesa can attract talent, which in turn will encourage businesses and employment opportunities to follow. (See Page 7 of Attachment 7)

Discussion ensued relative to changing the perception of Mesa and the importance of Falcon Field.

Vice Mayor Somers detailed the strategic priorities of District 6 and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 8)**

Vice Mayor Somers described District 6 as an emerging hub for economic growth in Southeast Mesa and the broader Valley. He reported that years of long-term planning laid the groundwork for development in the area, which is now beginning to take shape. He stated that while the district initially grew as a residential area, it is increasingly transitioning from a bedroom community to a center for employment and economic activity. (See Page 2 of Attachment 8)

Vice Mayor Somers noted that Mesa's reputation is improving as the COM attracts new investment and higher-quality employment opportunities. He highlighted economic development efforts over the past three years aimed at bringing high-value jobs to Southeast Mesa and emphasized the importance of continuing to attract high-wage, technology-oriented industries rather than primarily warehouse development. He stressed the importance of ensuring that development aligns with the long-term vision for the area. He pointed out the need to remain focused on creating a community where people can live, work, learn, and recreate. He discussed the district's strong quality of life, noting several family-oriented amenities, and recognized the area's reputation as a safe community. He emphasized that more retail and dining options are needed so residents do not have to leave the district for everyday amenities. (See Pages 3 through 6 of Attachment 8)

Vice Mayor Somers discussed the importance of strong partnerships, particularly with ASU Polytechnic, which provides education and workforce opportunities that support the district's economic development goals. He highlighted the critical role of internal City departments in helping implement and support the long-term vision for the area, ensuring that is not forgotten for short-term gains. He commented that District 6 will elevate Mesa by maintaining high standards for development and remain focused on attracting quality projects that align with the community's long-term goals. (See Pages 7 and 8 of Attachment 8)

Additional discussion ensued regarding balancing development and attracting the right balance of industry to the COM.

#### 4. Hear a summary and recap the Council Presentations.

Ms. Daniels provided an overview of the Councilmember presentations and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 9)**

Ms. Daniels recognized the shared energy and focus on opportunities for future growth and how the COM can position its systems and policies to support residents while measuring progress over time. She pointed out the strong synergy among the ideas presented and emphasized that Mesa's vision remains timeless. She described Mesa as a safe, desirable, family-centered community that continues to pursue economic prosperity while supporting opportunities to live, work, play, and learn. (See Pages 1 and 2 of Attachment 9)

Ms. Daniels added that many of the plans and assets developed in the past now require thoughtful updates to meet current needs and help future-proof the community, commending staff and Council for their continued efforts to move the COM forward.

5. Small-group discussions on Council Priorities including potential questions and policy-level issues related to Budget, Placemaking, and Economic Development.

Ms. Daniels explained that the small group discussions will take place during the lunch break and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 10)**

She pointed out that placemaking was one of the three key themes that emerged during pre-interviews with the Council. She stated that placemaking was defined as constructing, operating, or activating physical spaces in ways that strengthen community connections and improve the overall user experience. (See Pages 1 and 2 of Attachment 10)

Ms. Daniels asked the group to brainstorm how placemaking could help Elevate Mesa, focusing on two questions: which elements of placemaking are most important and which specific locations should be prioritized. She emphasized the importance of identifying precise locations so a tactical plan could be developed within the next 12 to 18 months.

(A recess took place at 11:53 a.m. The Council Strategic Planning Session resumed at 12:28 p.m.)

6. Full Council discussion related to Council Priorities focusing on Budget, Placemaking, and Economic Development opportunities.

Ms. Daniels invited the Council to join in a discussion about the budget process. She introduced Office of Management and Budget Director Brian Ritschel and displayed a PowerPoint presentation. **(See Attachment 11)**

Mr. Ritschel provided an overview of the financial principles and stated that they were adopted in a financial policy update in 2017 to establish minimum standards to guide financial management. He noted that the financial principles are set with higher target goals that the COM strives to achieve, helping demonstrate fiscal stability to rating agencies and supporting the ability to issue debt.

Ms. Daniels added that in the pre-retreat discussions, Council expressed interest in reviewing the budget and transparency in the budgeting process. She asked the Council to keep the conversation at a policy level and to identify any areas that may need clarification or where potential gaps should be addressed.

Responding to a question from Councilmember Duff regarding the policy related to bonded debt limits, specifically that bonded debt should not exceed the cash value of property within the COM, Deputy City Manager/Chief Financial Officer Michael Kennington explained that the COM reviews the assessed valuation of City-owned property when evaluating debt levels. He noted that the last review showed Mesa's bonded debt was approximately 16–17% of the allowable limit, which is well below the 26% threshold. He added that the COM does not intend to approach that upper limit.

In response to a request from Mayor Freeman, Finance Director Irma Ashworth confirmed that the current General Obligation (GO) bond levels are at 6% and remain well below the allowable 20% according to the statutory limitation.

Responding to a question from Councilmember Goforth regarding the financial principles aimed to achieve and maintain a structurally balanced budget, Mr. Ritschel explained that the COM develops its 10-year forecast conservatively, budgeting revenues cautiously to allow flexibility in

case of economic downturns or recessions. He noted that historically, the COM has aimed for a positive net source in the early years of the forecast, but inflation and economic conditions since the COVID pandemic have made that more challenging. He confirmed that the goal remains to return to achieving and maintaining a positive balance as conditions stabilize. He pointed out that the budget includes funding for all authorized positions, even when vacancies are expected, and must also account for costs such as retirements and vacation payouts. He stated that due to the varying factors and economic conditions, the COM budgets are conservative to ensure adequate funding and flexibility.

In response to a request from Councilmember Taylor, Mr. Ritschel explained the difference between recurring revenues and the use of fund balance. He noted that recurring revenues, such as regular income, are intended to cover ongoing operating expenses, and the General Fund balance functions as a savings account, which can be used for one-time expenses rather than ongoing costs. He provided the example that a one-time revenue source, such as a bonus, should be saved and used for a one-time expense rather than relied upon for recurring obligations. He confirmed that recurring and ongoing revenues are considered the same in this context.

Discussion ensued regarding the verbiage of Financial Principle 1.8.

Mr. Butler advised that state law requires the COM to adopt a balanced budget each year, but unexpected changes in revenues or expenses can occur throughout the year. He explained that, like other organizations and municipalities, the COM adjusts as needed to remain compliant with financial policies and State requirements. He added that the COM's financial structure is complex, with multiple funds and budget areas to manage but despite these complexities, the COM continues to maintain strong financial practices which are reflected in its high credit ratings and the preparation of a certified Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR). He emphasized that the COM prepares its budget conservatively each year, carefully balancing costs and taxpayer impacts while continuing to follow established financial policies and maintain responsible fiscal management.

Mr. Kennington added that using the verbiage "aim to" rather than "shall" provides the COM with flexibility in managing the budget. He explained that the budget process involves allocating and appropriating funds to authorize spending, and each year a contingency reserve is established to address unforeseen expenses. He confirmed that this approach ensures that funds are available if unexpected needs arise or if projects need to be accelerated, allowing the COM to respond appropriately while maintaining financial stability.

Mayor Freeman asked what an "Elevate Mesa" approach to the budget might look like, particularly how the COM can improve public understanding and communication. He noted that the COM's budget is complex and often difficult for residents to understand. He also referenced Mesa's voter-approved Home Rule authority, which is often misunderstood by voters.

Council discussion acknowledged the need to improve how financial information is communicated to help residents better understand the COM's budget and financial practices.

Ms. Daniels invited the Council to discuss Economic Development and asked what role the Mayor and Council have in the Economic Development of the COM. She emphasized the importance of understanding the desired role in the process so they can ensure staff are included at the appropriate points and times.

Discussion ensued regarding the desired role of the Mayor and Council to set policy and act as ambassadors.

Ms. Daniels summarized the discussion by emphasizing the importance of focusing on high-value economic development opportunities in both the short and long term, while ensuring the COM does not lose sight of long-term goals. She asked Council to help define what constitutes high value development so staff can better align future economic development efforts with Council priorities.

Mr. Butler referred to health/biomedical, aerospace and defense, and tourism/hospitality as key industry sectors being discussed nationally and locally. He noted that traditional return-on-investment measures do not always apply to developments such as data centers and emphasized that the COM is increasingly viewed as a leader in these economic development discussions. He added that a key policy consideration for Council is being intentional about attracting retail and other community-serving development so that jobs and spending remain within Mesa and continue to support the City's long-term economic sustainability.

Ms. Daniels provided an overview of the placemaking brainstorm session. (See Page 3 of Attachment 11)

Ms. Daniels summarized the placemaking discussions and identified several key themes, including economic vitality, community identity and branding, social connectivity, and overall livability and quality of experience. She reported that important elements of placemaking, included social connectivity and human-centered design, experience and aesthetic appeal, integration with nature and amenities, and strong economic and functional infrastructure. She reviewed the locations identified for priority placemaking efforts, noting that Downtown Mesa was mentioned most frequently, followed by Legacy Park/Arizona Athletic Grounds, Fiesta Mall, and areas including Red Mountain, Mesa Riverview, Dana Park, and Buckhorn.

Ms. Daniels expressed her appreciation for the great discussions and confirmed that the feedback received will be incorporated into a Strategic Action Plan document for Council review.

Mr. Butler thanked the Mayor and Council for the collaboration and reiterated the importance of continuing these types of discussions through future mini retreats.

Mayor Freeman concluded by emphasizing the shared goal of maintaining a strong and transparent city government. He encouraged Council to remain focused on good management and leadership and to be willing to make necessary changes to ensure the continued strength of the COM.

7. Adjournment.

Without objection, the City Council Strategic Planning Session adjourned at 1:56 p.m.

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MARK FREEMAN, MAYOR

ATTEST:

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HOLLY MOSELEY, CITY CLERK

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Strategic Planning Session of the City Council of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of February 2026. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

---

HOLLY MOSELEY, CITY CLERK

sr  
(Attachments – 11)

# City of Mesa Public Opinion Research

## *Likely Voters*

**March 3-6, 2025**

**September 22-25, 2025**

*\* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding*

## About HighGround Inc.

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- Specializing in strategic messaging surveys to gather a broad spectrum of public opinion including perception of the client, awareness of their challenges, public priorities, views on broad and specific issues, vulnerabilities, and argumentation.
- Five-time winner of “Best Polling Firm” by the *Arizona Capitol Times*
- Goal: Accurate, impartial results



## Survey Methodology

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The N=500 scientific surveys were conducted among high efficacy voters who have a history of electoral participation in the City of Mesa. Individuals were randomly selected to reflect quotas for likely participation in local elections.

The poll was weighted to model the likely turnout of voters across party, age, region, and gender.

The live interview surveys of voters was conducted to both landline and cell phone users. The margin of error for both surveys is  $\pm 4.3\%$  with a 95% confidence interval.

# Most Likely Voters

## Age Group:

14.0%	29 and under
18.0%	30 to 39
18.0%	40 to 49
23.8%	50 to 64
26.2%	65 Plus

## Area:

16.0%	District 1
17.0%	District 2
14.0%	District 3
10.0%	District 4
22.0%	District 5
21.0%	District 6

## Sex:

48.0%	Male
52.0%	Female

## Demographics

Do you have children under 18 living at home with you?

31.2% Yes  
67.0% No  
1.8% Refused

Ideology

21.2% Very Conservative  
16.2% Somewhat Conservative  
33.0% Moderate  
10.2% Somewhat Liberal  
10.2% Very Liberal  
4.6% Don't Know  
4.6% Refused

# In general, would you say that the City of Mesa is heading in the right direction, or the wrong direction?

- 16.0% Definitely right direction
- 46.2% Probably right direction
- 9.8% Probably wrong direction
- 5.4% Definitely wrong direction
- 22.6% Don't Know, Refused

<b>62.2%</b>	<b>Total Right</b>
<b>15.2%</b>	<b>Total Wrong</b>
<b>22.6%</b>	<b>DK, Refused</b>

- 29 and Under: 70.0% right direction
- 30-39: 61.1% right direction
- 40-49: 57.8% right direction
- 50-64: 59.7% right direction
- 65+: 64.1% right direction

<u>March 2025</u>	
59.0%	Total Right
18.8%	Total Wrong

# What do you consider to be the top issue facing the City of Mesa today?

- 29.8% Housing prices
- 17.8% Inflation and high prices
- 15.6% Homelessness
- 12.0% Traffic and congestion
- 8.8% Public Safety
- 8.6% Controlling city spending
- 3.2% Other
- 4.0% Don't Know
- 0.2% Refused

<29:	41.4% Housing prices
30-39:	40.0% Housing prices
40-49:	38.9% Housing prices
50-64:	22.7% Housing prices
65+:	19.8% Inflation and High Prices

March 2025

- 32.0% Housing prices
- 20.8% Inflation and high prices
- 12.8% Traffic and congestion
- 12.6% Homelessness

# How would you rate the Mayor and City Council's overall job performance in the City of Mesa?

3.2% Excellent  
 24.2% Very Good  
 44.8% OK  
 7.0% Poor  
 2.8% Failing  
 16.4% Undecided  
 1.6% Refused

<29:	24.3% excellent/very good
30-39:	27.8% excellent/very good
40-49:	24.4% excellent/very good
50-64:	27.7% excellent/very good
65+:	30.5% excellent/very good

March 2025

3.0%	Excellent
20.4%	Very Good
47.0%	OK
8.0%	Poor
5.4%	Failing

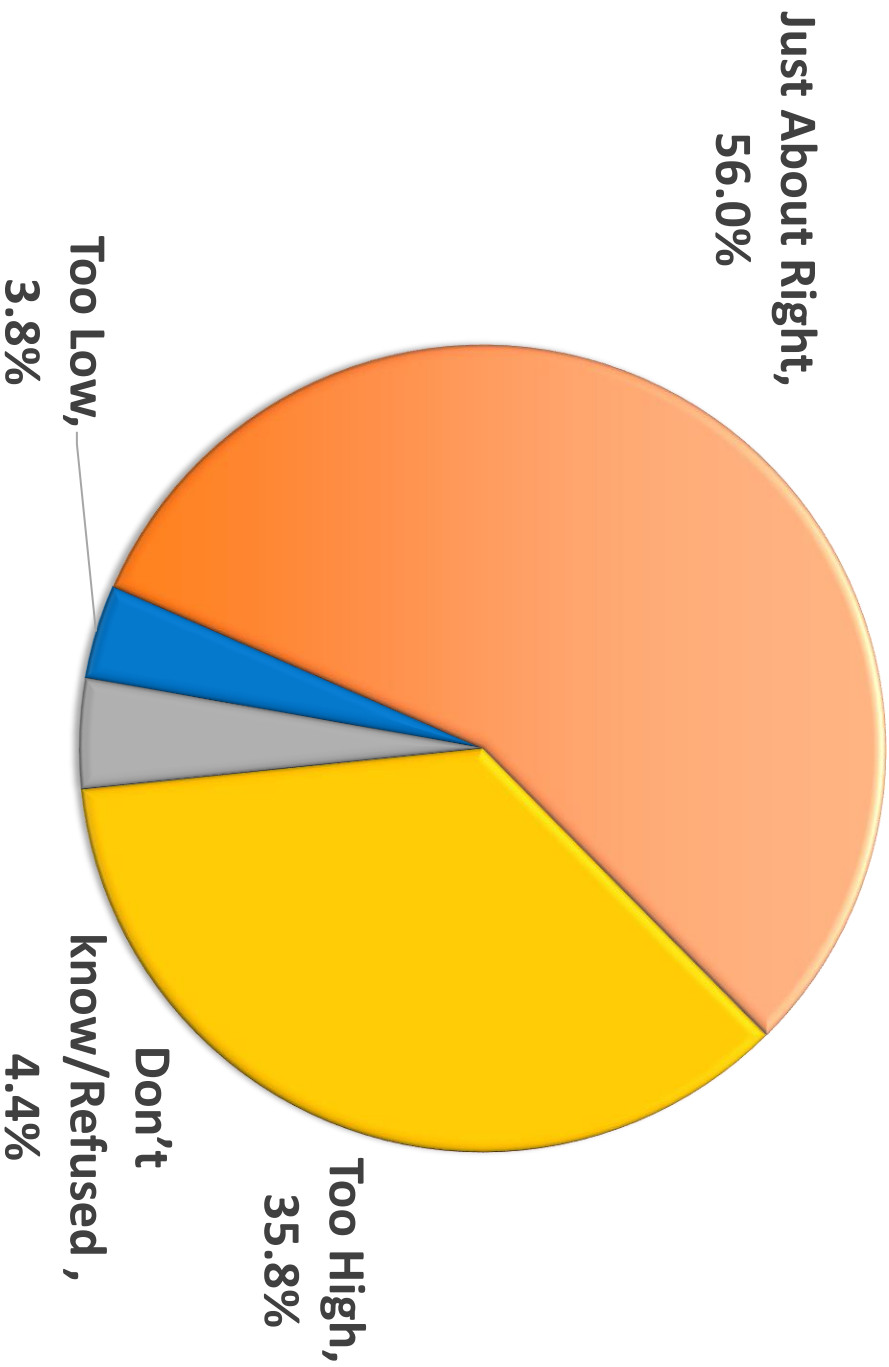
## Rating Municipal Services

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	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Excellent/Very Good</u>
Fire and Medical	4.08	59.2%
Libraries	3.90	76.4%
Museums	3.74	59.0%
Parks	3.69	38.8%
Police	3.66	62.8%
Recreation programs	3.57	44.4%
Open space and trails	3.53	40.6%
Streets and transportation	3.22	47.8%
Utilities	3.22	51.0%

# In general, would you say that amount of taxes you pay to the City of Mesa are:

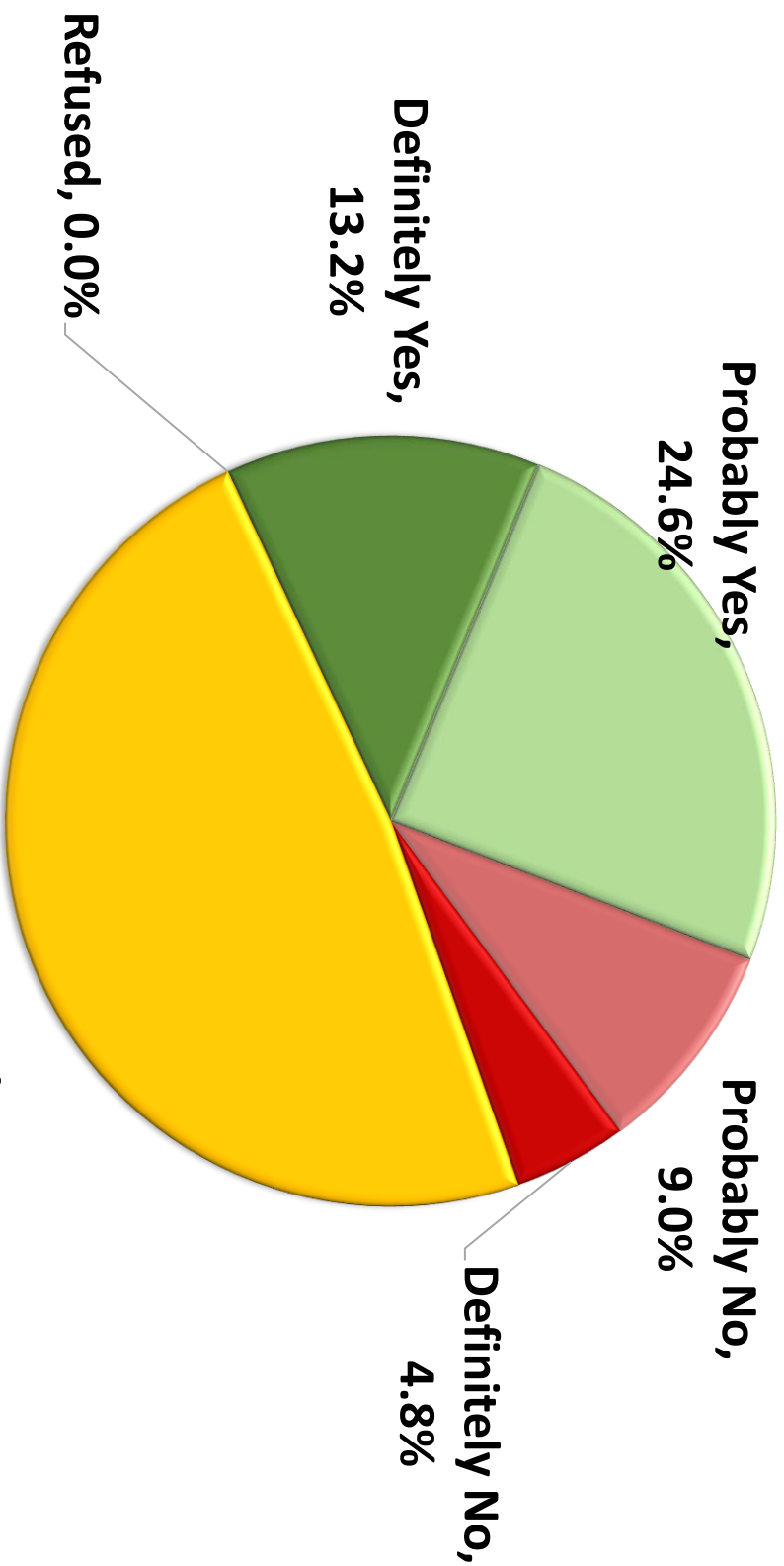


	Too Low	Just Right	Too High
Under 29	5.7%	61.4%	27.1%
30 - 39	2.2%	65.6%	28.9%
40 - 49	6.7%	56.7%	32.2%
50 - 64	3.4%	46.2%	46.2%
65+	2.3%	55.0%	38.2%
District 1	2.5%	58.8%	33.8%
District 2	5.9%	57.6%	29.4%
District 3	2.9%	62.9%	31.4%
District 4	6.0%	56.0%	34.0%
District 5	4.5%	54.5%	38.2%
District 6	1.9%	49.5%	43.8%

### March 2025

2.6% Too low  
 53.0% Just about right  
 39.4% Too high

# Arizona allows cities to impose a primary property tax to fund general city services. To the best of your knowledge, does the City of Mesa currently impose this tax on its residents?



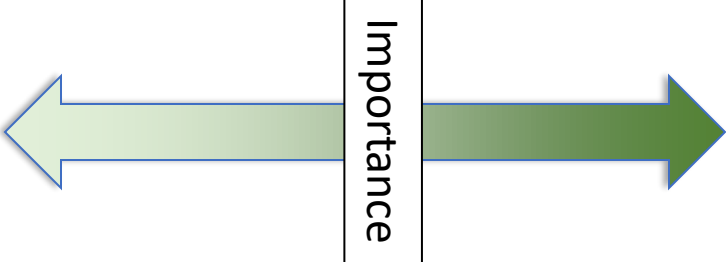
**Total: 37.8% Yes**  
**13.8% No**

	Yes	No
Under 29	35.7%	18.6%
30 - 39	32.2%	12.2%
40 - 49	44.4%	13.3%
50 - 64	41.2%	10.9%
65+	35.1%	15.3%
District 1	40.0%	12.5%
District 2	37.6%	11.8%
District 3	37.1%	15.7%
District 4	32.0%	18.0%
District 5	31.8%	12.7%
District 6	45.7%	14.3%

March 2025  
 54.0% Yes  
 11.4% No  
 34.0% Don't know

# Policy Priorities

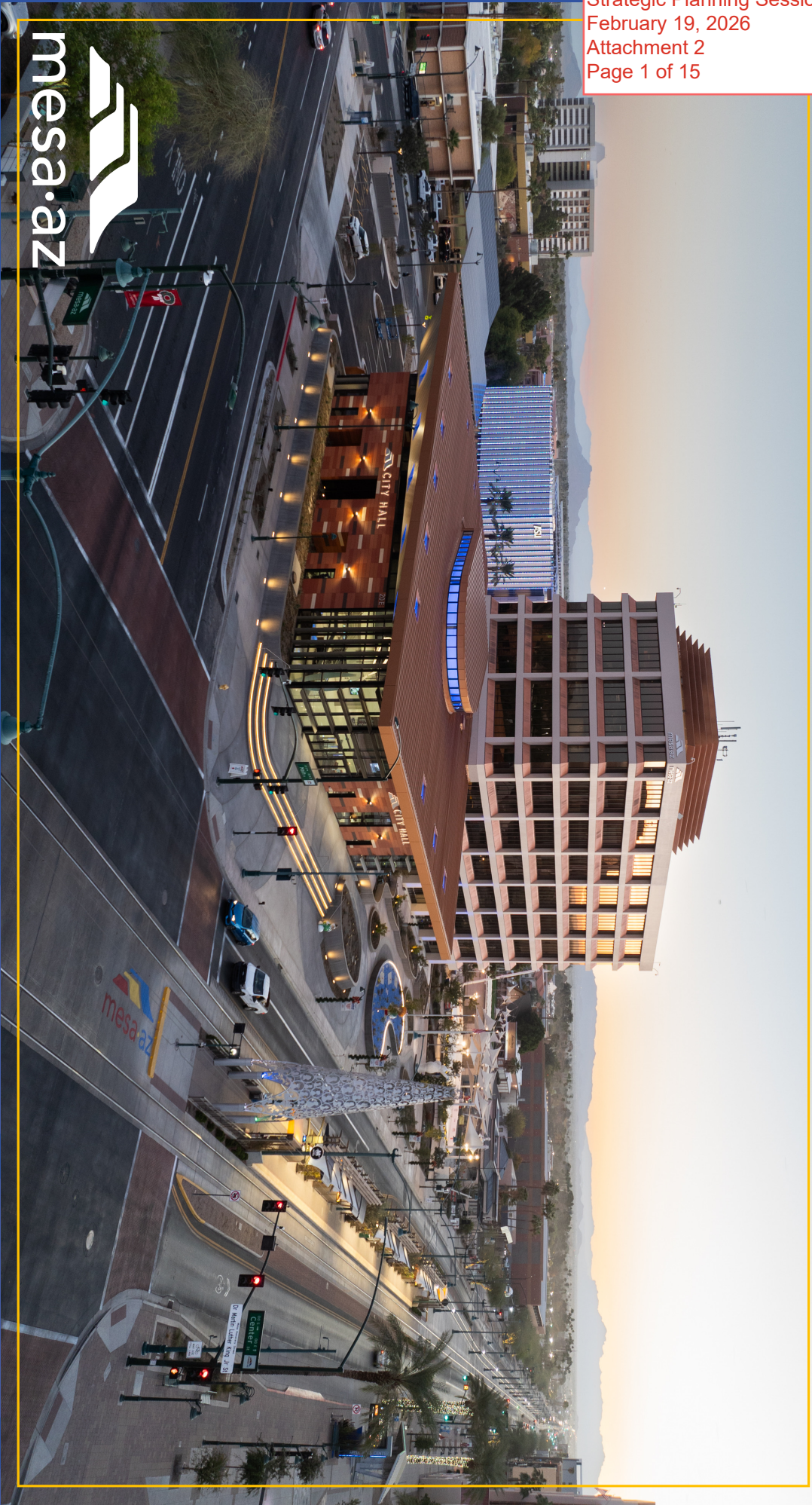
	<u>Mean</u>
Ensuring government transparency	4.62
Reducing crime	4.45
Supporting community health and safety	4.43
Conserving water	4.43
Attracting and retaining high-quality jobs	4.42
Protecting taxpayers	4.37
Addressing homelessness	4.33
Promoting sustainability	4.09
Fostering robust workforce training and development	3.92
Investing in vibrant and attractive neighborhoods	3.61
Attracting high-quality retail and restaurants	3.54



## How do you prefer to receive information about City of Mesa services, projects, and decisions?

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39.0%	Email newsletter
24.8%	Social media
24.2%	Letters or postcards
15.4%	Television news
14.8%	Online Publication
13.6%	Flyers
7.4%	Newspaper
6.2%	Radio
3.2%	Mesa's Channel 11
4.4%	Don't Know
2.8%	Refused



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*From Vision to Strategic Priorities*





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# What Elevate Mesa Represents

**Raising the standard for Mesa's future.**

- Quality growth and development
- Innovative trusted public safety
- Reliable water and infrastructure
- Education and Workforce Readiness
- Transparent, accountable government



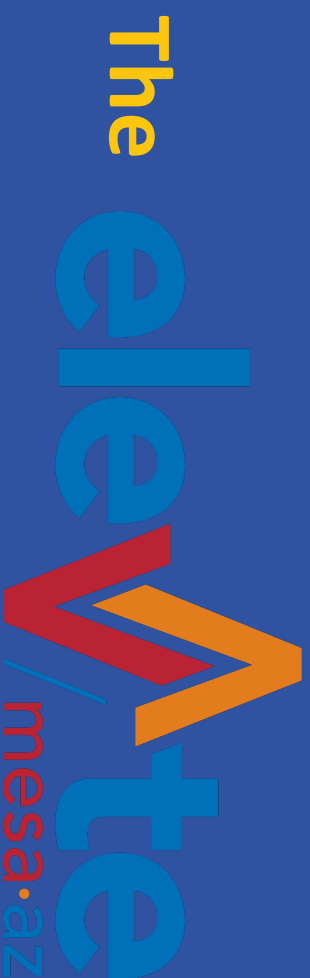
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# Why Strategic Focus Matters Now

**The context has changed.**

- State decisions increasingly shape local outcomes
- Growth pressures are uneven across the city
- Fiscal realities demand clearer priorities

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## Pillars

- Quality Growth & Development
- Housing Balance
- Water & Infrastructure Resilience
- Safe & Innovative Communities
- Education & Workforce
- Neighborhoods: Standards & Reinvestment
- Transparent Government



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# Quality Growth & Development

## Growth that improves Mesa.

- Speed and quality matter
- Development must fit Mesa's character
- Infrastructure readiness is essential



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# Housing Balance

## Choice, stability, and livability.

- Housing options across life stages
- Multifamily growth balanced with neighborhood stability
- Homeownership opportunities that build stability
- Infrastructure and services keep pace



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# Water & Infrastructure Resilience

## Planning for Mesa's Future.

- Water stewardship is foundational
- Infrastructure is the resident experience
- Resilience reduces long-term cost and risk



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# Safe & Innovative Communities

## Modern safety with public trust.

- Innovation serves outcomes, not headlines
- Safety includes neighborhoods and streets
- Transparency strengthens legitimacy



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# Education & Workforce

## Preparing residents for opportunity.

- Education as an economic development strategy
- Workforce alignment with Mesa's growth sectors
- Partnerships that strengthen talent pipelines



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# Neighborhoods: Standards & Reinvestment

## Protecting quality of life.

- Code compliance protects neighborhoods
- Redevelopment focuses effort where needed most
- City services meet residents where they are
- Education and encouragement build pride of place



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# Transparent Government

## Trust through clarity.

- Clear priorities guide budgets
- Core services remain protected and essential
- Tradeoffs are explicit
- Progress is measurable and public



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# The Elevate Mesa Priority Filter

## A strategic priority must:

- Advance an Elevate Mesa pillar
- Protect local control or adapt to state limits
- Strengthen neighborhoods
- Be fiscally sustainable
- Produce measurable outcomes



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# Elevate Mesa in Practice

**From vision to results.**

- Vision → priorities → budget → outcomes
- Discipline today protects Mesa tomorrow.



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Wallethub

**#1** Best-Run City in Arizona

**#11** Best-Run City in the U.S.

*(Wallethub, 2025)*



**#2** Safest Large City in the U.S.

*(Most recent data from the National Incident-Based Reporting System or NIBRS)*



CoworkingCafe

**#4** for Economic Growth

Among Large U.S. Cities

*(CoworkingCafe, 2025)*



**#9** Best Big City to Live In

*(U.S. News & World Report, 2025)*



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# Mesa District 1

## Strategic Priorities 2026

**Presented by Councilmember Adams**





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## The 30,000-Foot View

**Vision Statement:** Legacy values, future opportunities, and minimal regulation coupled with a “yes we can” attitude.

**Success Defined:** Adopt a proactive, enabling permitting approach that facilitates redevelopment, and the adaptive reuse of underutilized buildings. Replace overly restrictive and inflexible regulatory barriers with a “how can we” framework and attitude that supports responsible development rather than discourage these activities through excessive regulation.



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# Priority 1: Keep Mesa Safe and Strengthen Our Neighborhoods

**Smart Growth:** Manage infill development to protect existing neighborhood character. Insure that Code Compliance efforts are fair and non-discriminatory.

**Strategic Economy:** Attract economic development that compliments and respects the character of existing neighborhoods.

**Innovative Housing:** Advance community-based models such as *The Other Side Village* that are not primarily taxpayer funded and address the root causes of homelessness.



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## Priority 2: Protect Our Land Through Responsible Growth and Stewardship

Mesa will promote stable, livable neighborhoods by balancing private property rights with the preservation of community character through responsible infill. Adaptive reuse is neither restricted nor overly regulated. By streamlining the development process to ensure accountability and speed, the city will eliminate overly burdensome permitting and regulatory barriers to growth while actively facilitating new homeownership opportunities.

This balanced approach ensures that all new development respects existing residents, assures that developer commitments are met, and strengthens the overall community.



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## Priority 3: Promote Economic Growth That Supports Our Community

Sustainable growth depends on consistent policies that support investment while protecting the quality of life for residents. Mesa should project the attitude that we are “Open for Business” and therefore be supportive of small businesses in particular. We should reduce or eliminate regulatory practices that hinder and restrict small business growth unreasonably.

**Success Defined:** Business attraction and retention is dependent upon these policies as well as on maintaining high levels of public safety. Mesa enjoys a stable, predictable environment where new businesses are welcomed, and businesses are confident to invest. Infrastructure and services are maintained that keep pace with growth, and new economic activity encourages quality jobs. Consistent policies are in place that ensure balanced growth, support long-term prosperity, and protect the quality of life for residents.



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## Partnerships & Resources

**Collaboration:** The Office of Management & Budget is key, plus Public Safety, Development Services, Neighborhood Services, Economic Development, and Housing & Community Development.

**Community Partners:** Local neighborhood associations, urban farming and community gardening organizations, organizations that deliver effective solutions to homelessness without primarily relying on public funding, developers committed to responsible infill, affordable housing advocates, and business groups that support economic growth initiatives.

**Barriers:** Finance and budget is the main limiting factor. Revenues and expenditures must be brought into balance, and reserve thresholds set by Council must be observed. The practice of uniform, across-the-board reductions, applied without regard to function or value delivered is ineffective and should be abandoned. Essential functions may warrant increased funding, while activities that do not meet core objectives should be reduced or eliminated. Financial discipline requires deliberate choice.



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## In District 1 we Elevate Mesa by...

...prioritizing safety, responsible growth, and sustainable economic development, these initiatives raise the standard for Mesa by creating safe, vibrant, and livable neighborhoods.

They ensure development aligns with community character while supporting homeownership, affordable housing, and a business climate that attracts investment and quality jobs. Together, they strengthen community connections, enhance shared spaces through urban farming and gardens, and reflect a fiscally responsible, targeted approach to budgeting that supports thoughtful, inclusive, and sustainable growth.



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# Mesa District 2 Strategic Priorities 2026

Presented by Councilmember Taylor





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## The 30,000-Foot View

**Vision Statement:** A model family-oriented safe, affordable, vibrant, gathering place community with revitalized spaces. District Two will be a model family-oriented community, offering safe, neighborly suburban living anchored by vibrant local places to shop, dine, and gather year-round.

**Success Defined:** Within one year, at least one key redevelopment area in District Two – Buckhorn Baths would quantifiably prove reduced calls for service, increased local sales tax generation, and fewer resident complaints compared to the prior year.



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## Priority 1: Redevelopment Opportunities

D2 Significantly lacks the relevant redevelopment and infill development seen today that revives economic growth and community stability. Drive the district and one will see blight, functional obsolescence, and deterioration along Main Street and in several strip mall shopping centers, Buckhorn Baths, the homeless hotels, and AZ Golf Resort.

**Desired Outcome:** Targeted redevelopment and infill investment transform functionally obsolete and underperforming commercial sites in District Two into active, neighborhood-scaled destinations that strengthen local businesses, improve public safety indicators, and reinforce surrounding residential stability.



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## Partnerships & Resources

**Collaboration:** District Residents; Economic Development; Planning & Zoning; Development Services; Police and Code Compliance; Transportation; City Council leadership; property owners; neighborhood-scale developers; local business operators; and community-focused lenders.

**Barriers:** Lack of a clear, consistent, and district-specific redevelopment framework that gives staff, property owners, and developers confidence to invest in neighborhood-scaled revitalization. Capital follows clarity. Without a predictable framework, even available funding and incentives fail to activate redevelopment.



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## **In District 2 we Elevate Mesa by...**

... revitalizing aging commercial areas, strengthening and improving our local businesses, and public safety while preserving stable suburban neighborhoods—creating a replicable model for real and sustainable growth, increased tax base resilience, and stronger community cohesion citywide.



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# Mesa District 3 Strategic Priorities 2026

Presented by Councilmember Heredia





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## The 30,000-Foot View

**Vision Statement: Enhancing Placemaking Opportunities through strategic redevelopment and reinvestment.**

Success Defined: Visible progress and momentum in key redevelopment areas, including Fiesta Mall, Riverview, and Main Street, that reinforce the district as a vibrant place to live, work, and play.



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## Priority 1: Redevelopment

Several long-standing commercial centers are at critical transition points and require continued focus to move from planning to active redevelopment.

**Desired Outcome:** Advance redevelopment efforts in priority areas such as Fiesta Mall, the ongoing Asian District, and Riverview, positioning these centers for long-term economic vitality and community use.



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## Priority 2: Infrastructure

Aging and evolving infrastructure must keep pace with redevelopment and growth, from streets and mobility to utilities and public services.

Desired Outcome: Maintain an up-to-date understanding of infrastructure needs and prioritize strategic investments that support redevelopment, safety, and future growth.



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## Priority 3: Quality of Life

As the district grows and diversifies, community needs continue to evolve—requiring constant attention to parks, public safety, and neighborhood well-being.

Desired Outcome: Enhance quality of life by improving parks, supporting neighborhood safety, and staying responsive to the diverse needs of residents and businesses.



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## Partnerships & Resources

### Collaboration:

Key City Departments: Development Services (Planning), Economic Development, Urban Transformation.

External Partners: Developers, small businesses, and local stakeholders

**Barriers:** Limited time and resources to move multiple complex initiatives forward simultaneously.



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## **In District 3 we Elevate Mesa by...**

... transforming major areas of the city over the next several years, elevating Mesa as a destination community, strengthening it's identity as a place to live, work, and play for current residents and future generations.



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# Mesa District 4

# Strategic Priorities 2026

Presented by Councilmember Duff





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## The 30,000-Foot View

**Vision Statement:** The Downtown Arts and Innovation District is a vortex of creativity & opportunity, leading the way into the 22nd century.

Twelve months from now, success is celebrating the formal launch of the Light Walk corridor with early infrastructure improvements, and development commitments that clearly position Downtown Mesa as the region's leading hub for arts, innovation, and entrepreneurship.



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## Priority 1: Arts & Innovation District

Leverage Downtown Mesa assets—Mesa Arts Center, ASU MIX and future schools, The Studios, Mesa Business Builder, Mesa Convention Center, Mesa Amphitheatre, and emerging innovation spaces into a unified ecosystem to drive Mesa’s creative economy instead of functioning as adjacent destinations

**Desired Outcome:** Establish the Light Walk as a recognizable, branded corridor that physically and culturally connects arts, education, innovation, and entrepreneurship. This includes coordinated wayfinding, lighting, public art and private-sector interest that signals momentum and investability



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## Priority 2: Catalyze Vertical Growth and Job Creation Along the Arts & Innovation Corridor

Attract creatives, employers, and professional-wage jobs while managing growth responsibly and leveraging ASU's educational pipeline

Desired Outcome: Position the Arts & Innovation District for thoughtful vertical development—supporting ASU expansion, incubation and office space, hotels, and employment centers—while attracting creative technologies and innovation-driven employers that generate long-term economic returns.



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## Priority 3: Build a Walkable, Multimodal Downtown Core

Growth and redevelopment will fail without a people-first mobility system that prioritizes safety, accessibility, and connectivity—especially as Downtown and West Mesa merge.

**Desired Outcome:** Advance implementation of Downtown Mesa’s Micro Mobility Plan, including protected pathways for walking, biking, scooters, and emerging technologies. Establish momentum toward an autonomous downtown shuttle and strengthen light rail integration to ensure seamless first- and last-mile connections for residents, workers, and visitors



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## Partnerships & Resources

**Collaboration:** Office of Urban Transformation, Economic Development, Development Services, Engineering, Transportation, Transit, Mesa Arts Center, Parks, Recreation, & Community Facilities, ASU

**Barriers:** Funding and Council support. Funding for the Light Walk, ASU expansion and renovation of the Mesa Convention Center and Mesa Amphitheater.



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## In District 4 we Elevate Mesa by...

...transforming Downtown into a nationally competitive Arts & Innovation

District—one that attracts talent, investment, and opportunity. Being people-centered and connected is an essential component for success. The Light Walk is not just a corridor; it is a platform for economic growth, creative connection, and mobility innovation that positions Mesa as a destination for 22nd-century ideas, jobs, and lifestyles.

When realized, this vision unites Downtown and West Mesa into a single, vibrant area—driving prosperity rooted in creativity, connectivity, and opportunity.



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# Mesa District 5 Strategic Priorities 2026

Presented by Councilmember Goforth





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## The 30,000 Foot View

**Vision Statement: To champion progress that elevates quality of life, strengthens identity, and drives economic vitality.**

**Success Defined:** A culture and regulatory shift in the city that attracts distinctive, sustainable, development while preserving residents' quality of life and community values.



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## **Priority 1: Public Safety**

Through recruitment, retention and data-driven innovation in public safety we will continue to maintain our status as the safest city in our population category.



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## **Priority 2: Responsive and Market Differentiated Development**

Capital markets favor large-scale projects by institutional developers resulting in national tenants and less productive use of space. This results in residents traveling outside their communities to surrounding cities for unique shopping, eating and entertainment.

Through responsive and market differentiated development we can attract mixed-use placemaking with clusters of small-scale activity that are unique, connected, and high-quality adding layers of texture to neighborhoods that reflect their existing character.



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## **Priority 3: Executive Business Aviation Airport at Falcon Field**

Updating and implementing Falcon Field Airport Master Plan and  
Falcon District Strategic Plan

**Success Defined:** A thriving Falcon District anchored by Falcon Field Airport, which attracts employment, supports high quality retail, restaurant and hospitality and is in balance with the quality of life of the people who live in it.



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## Partnerships & Resources

**Collaboration:** MPD and MFMD, Falcon Field airport, Economic Development, and Development Services.

**Barriers:** Perception of Mesa, its people and organization that this kind of progress will not be successful.



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## **In District 5 we Elevate Mesa by...**

**...raising the standard for Mesa's future through increasing the tax base, building community wealth, and attracting talent that strengthens the long-term prosperity for all residents.**



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# Mesa District 6 Strategic Priorities 2026

**Presented by Vice Mayor Somers**





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## The 30,000-Foot View

**Vision Statement:** Southeast Mesa will emerge as a center of regional importance by leveraging strategic partnerships to anchor a resilient local economy that supports strong neighbor entertainment destinations.

**Success Defined:** In the next 12 months I would like to have agreements in place for generational projects like Legacy Park and ASU Polytechnic Innovation Zone.



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## Priority 1: The Economy

Attract sectors that bring more high-value jobs per acre (goal is 100,000 new jobs).

**Desired Outcome:** Attract more investment from businesses in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, semiconductor production (not just logistics), healthcare (providers, research, pharmaceuticals) and tourism. Motivate ASU to move forward on Innovation Zone. Incentivize accelerated redevelopment of declining areas like Superstition Mall.



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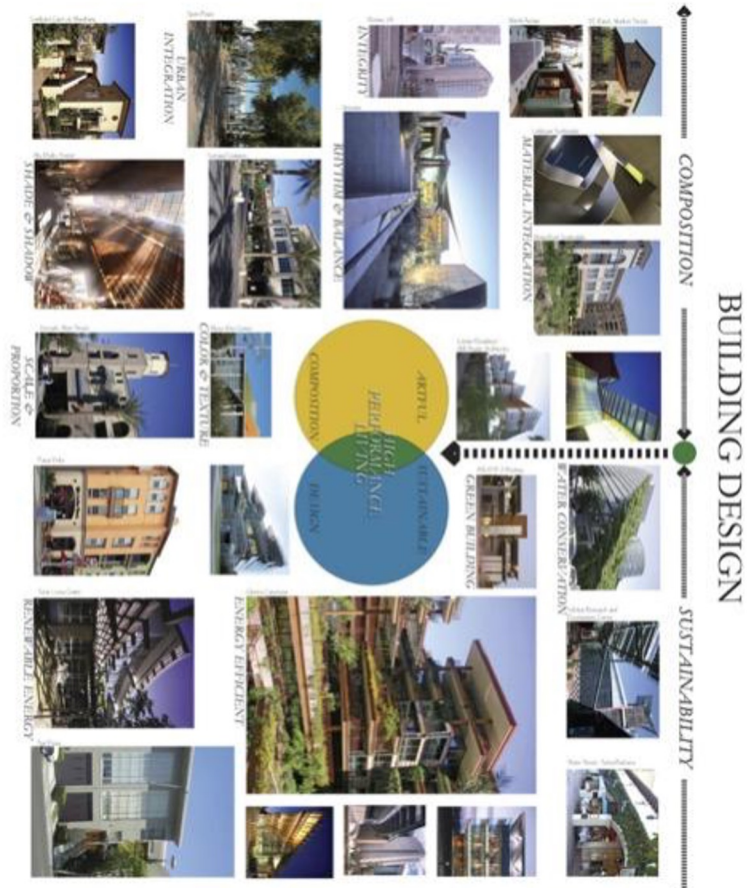
## Priority 2: The Land

Improve synergy of development.

Desired Outcome: Create thoughtful transitions between residential and industrial areas. Optimize remaining land near Gateway Airport for greater job growth and economic impact. Pursue a more cohesive live, work, play, learn environment by incorporating elements of the Mesa Gateway Strategic Development Plan.



Note: Photos are intended to be representative of the character and quality of the types of architecture and buildings constructed within Mesa Proving Grounds and are not intended to express specific design details, colors or materials.





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## Priority 3: The People

Reinforce focus on Quality Retail Initiatives with measures.  
(build on the program)

**Desired Outcome:** Vigorously pursue new retail, entertainment, and dining options. Develop enhanced strategies to demonstrate demand for these types of investments. Set higher expectations and sense of urgency on Legacy Park development.



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# Partnerships & Resources

## Collaboration

- ASU Polytechnic - Innovation District can be a significant launch point for advanced manufacturing.
- Vestar has a vision for updated retail and full-service hospitality (a once in a lifetime opportunity).
- Development Services, City Attorney, and City Manager's Office are the key internal actors needed to get this done.
- SRP for both water and power resources.

## Barriers

- The long-term vision has too often given way to short-term gain.
- Resources: We are managing the water challenges well and investing in our long-term portfolio, but this will remain an ongoing issue.
- Power: Capacity for advanced manufacturing attraction and expansion is dwindling. SRP is key here. Mesa needs safe, long-term generating solutions or innovation from key partners.



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## In District 6 we Elevate Mesa by...

- Jobs and economic growth support citywide services, infrastructure, and public safety.
- Smart development maintains the strength of communities and quality of life that constituents want.
- Raising the bar for development in District 6 sets an expectation for the types of infill and redevelopment we want to see across the city.



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	Quality Growth + Development	Housing Balance	Water + Infrastructure Resilience	Safe + Innovative Communities	Education + Workforce	Neighborhoods: Standards + Reinvestment	Transparent Gov.
Mayor Rishman	The Land The People				The Economy		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Vice Mayor Somers	Promote Economic Growth That Supports Our Community	Protect Our Land Through Responsible Growth & Stewardship				Keep Mesa Safe + Strengthen Our Neighborhoods	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Councilmember Adams	Redevelopment Opportunities						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Councilmember Taylor	Redevelopment		Infrastructure			Quality of Life	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Councilmember Heredia	Arts & Innovation District				Catalyze Vertical Growth and Job Creation Along the Arts & Innovation Corridor		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Councilmember Duff	Build a Walkable, Multimodal Downtown Core						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Councilmember Goforth	Responsive and Market Differentiated Development Executive Business Aviation Airport at Falcon Field			Public Safety			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



# Reflections & Resolutions

- **Quality Growth & Development -**
  - **Housing Balance**
  - **Water & Infrastructure**
  - **Resilience**
  - **Safe & Innovative Communities**
- **Education & Workforce**
- **Neighborhoods: Standards & Reinvestment**
- **Transparent Government**



# Placemaking

place·mak·ing verb \ 'plās- ,mā-kiŋ \

*Definition:*

To construct, operate, and/or activate a physical space in ways that enhance and strengthen community connection and improve the user experience.



# Placemaking Brainstorm

*Use the sticky notes and sharpies to share your ideas.*

*One idea per sticky note.*

**How does placemaking Elevate Mesa?**

**What elements of placemaking are important to you?**

**What location needs to be top priority for placemaking?**

*(Only your top two answers for this question please.)*



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## Strategic Discussion

# BUDGET



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## Strategic Discussion

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



# Placemaking Report

## *How does placemaking Elevate Mesa?*

- Economic Vitality and Investment*
- Identity, Branding, and City Pride*
- Social Connectivity and Community Fabric*
- Livability and Quality of Experience*

## *What elements of placemaking are important to you?*

- Social Connectivity and Human-Centric Design*
- Experience and Aesthetic “Magnetism”*
- Integration with Nature and Amenities*
- Economic and Functional Infrastructure*

## *What location needs to be top priority for placemaking?*

- Downtown (4)*
- Legacy Park / AZ Athletic Grounds (5)*
- Fiesta Mall (2)*
- Other Locations: Red Mountain, Falcon Field, Mesa Riverview, Longbow, Dana Park, Buckhorn*