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Mesa praises Morrison Ranch proposal

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A family tradition of farming property in southeast Mesa and Gilbert for 80 years is disappearing quickly as cotton fields turn into houses.

That Valley-wide trend continues with Desert Place at Morrison Ranch, a huge residential development enthusiastically endorsed Thursday by the Mesa Planning and Zoning Board.

More than 200 acres near Guadalupe and Sossaman roads would turn into potentially 697 houses in the master-planned community lined with trees and an agricultural flavor.

"This development is a breath of fresh air," board member Pat Esparza said.

Other board members praised the development's traditional approach, which features 22 percent open space, said Scott Morrison of Morrison Ranch Inc., the developer.

"I think this is a nice project," board member Frank Mizner said. "I see this as a great asset for this part of Mesa."

The board voted unanimously to recommend that the Mesa City Council approve a zoning change from agricultural to medium-density residential.

Morrison said his family plans the development and sells lots to builders.

Howard Morrison, Scott's brother, said it would be at least two years until houses are built on the property. He said it is no longer economically feasible to farm in the area because well water is expensive.

"The fields take on a different personality based on the crops grown," he said, remembering how his family grew watermelons on the land one year, only to lose money when there was a glut on the market.

He said most people in the Southeast Valley live on land that once was used to grow cotton or other crops.

Scott Morrison said the Mesa development would be similar to the family's existing projects in Gilbert, featuring tree-lined streets, white rail fencing and other "pastoral characteristics of the early homesteads of the Southeast Valley."

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