



Arizona



PARCEL 30

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL SUMMARY REPORT



DECEMBER 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Executive Summary
4	About the Urban Land Institute
4	ULI Arizona Leadership
4	ULI Arizona Staff
5	About ULI AzTAPs
6	ULI AzTAP Committee
7	Acknowledgments
7	Town of Sahuarita
7	Stakeholders
8	Sahuarita AzTAP Panelists
9	Study Focus Area
10	Town of Sahuarita History
12	Population Growth Since Incorporation
12	Shifting Demographics
13	Master-Planned Communities
14	Shifting Demographics
15	Economic Growth
16	Development Strategies
17	The Town as Master Developer
18	Playing the Long Game
19	Building an Effective Team
20	Community Engagement in Planning
21	Front-Loading
22	Connectivity by Design
23	Prioritizing Community Needs
24	Establishing Development Areas
25	Map Showing Areas
26	Area 1 – Community Gathering Spaces
28	Area 2 – Outdoor Recreation
31	Area 3 – Commercial Investment Zone
32	Area 4 – Family Entertainment District
35	Area 5 – Hotel and Hospitality
36	Feasibility Study – Hotel Development
37	Recommendations

Executive Summary

The Town of Sahuarita partnered with ULI Arizona for a Technical Assistance Panel to develop focused recommendations for the development of Parcel 30 and the La Villita Community Center. The Town is looking to leverage publicly owned land to strengthen quality of life while advancing long-term economic development.

The Panel recommends prioritizing Parcel 30 as a community-centered, recreation-led destination that serves Sahuarita residents first while evolving into the Family Entertainment Center of the Metro-Tucson Area, serving as a hub for community gathering, recreation, entertainment, hospitality and long-term economic development.

Six Key Priorities:

1. **Establish the Town as the Master Developer:** Maintain control of land, phasing, and infrastructure while sequencing public investments to reduce risk and build confidence for private partners.
2. **Develop a Community Gathering Space as the Catalyst:** Create an immediate public benefit, establish a strong sense of place, and generate the activity necessary to attract private investment.
3. **Pursue a Recreation Center through Phased Funding:** Take advantage of opportunities that allow each area to succeed independently while reinforcing the overall vision through shared infrastructure, connectivity, and coordinated programming.
4. **Create a Defined Entertainment District:** Transform community activity into sustainable private investment that includes dining, indoor and outdoor recreation, and event-driven attractions designed to activate evenings and weekends, extend visitor stays, and generate ongoing revenue.
5. **Advance Hospitality through a Hotel Feasibility Study:** Initiate an independent analysis and bring sector specific expertise onto the team to evaluate market positioning, scale, and timing prior to issuing a Request for Qualifications.
6. **Reserve an Economic Development Parcel for Future Employers:** Set aside flexible space to respond to opportunities as Parcel 30 and the Town of Sahuarita develop and grow.

Overall, the Panel's recommendations establish a clear, recreation-led framework that balances community benefit with economic sustainability. By leading with public investment, sequencing development thoughtfully, and prioritizing connectivity, Sahuarita can transform Parcel 30 into a recognizable destination that reflects community values, attracts private partners, and delivers lasting social and economic returns.

About the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute has members in 95 countries worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI Arizona District Council

The ULI Arizona District Council was formed in the early 1980s as a direct response to the need for educational forums and events at a local level. ULI Arizona brings public and private sector leaders together to share and exchange ideas, information, and experiences to shape the way communities grow.

ULI Arizona Leadership

Steve Lindley

Chief Operating Officer, Holualoa Companies
Chair, ULI Arizona District Council

Tammy Carr

Director of Business Development, Brinkmann
Constructors
Vice Chair, ULI Arizona District Council

Amy Malloy

Principal, Evolve Ventures
Treasurer, ULI Arizona District Council

ULI Arizona Staff

Debra Z. Sydenham, FAICP

Executive Director

Gerri Lipp

Senior Director

Sydney Henry

Events and Operations Coordinator

**The mission of the
Urban Land Institute is
to shape the future of
the built environment
for transformative
impact in communities
worldwide.**

About ULI AzTAPs

The ULI Arizona Technical Assistance Panel (AzTAP) Program is a service offered by ULI Arizona to assist Arizona municipalities, counties, regions, and nonprofits in the preliminary study of complex land use planning, development, and redevelopment issues. Drawing from a seasoned professional membership base, AzTAPs provide objective and responsible guidance on a variety of land use and real estate strategic decisions ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions.

AzTAP was initiated by the ULI Arizona District Council in 2003 as an extension of the time-tested national ULI Advisory Services Program that was established in 1947 with proven success for its comprehensive, pragmatic approach to solving land use challenges.

Technical assistance interdisciplinary Panel teams are carefully chosen for their specific knowledge and the holistic lens that they provide to help resolve local issues.

Communities gain valuable insight and direction from highly qualified industry professionals who volunteer their time. Professionals who bring their expertise to bear also receive an intimate understanding of the unique development opportunities and challenges facing communities. The interaction among Panel experts, local communities, and residents strengthens the community fabric and builds opportunities for strong public and private sector collaboration to promote thriving Arizona communities. The focus and scope of issues defined by the local sponsoring community make each AzTAP unique, so the approach is intentionally flexible to tailor it to the specific needs presented. Past ULI AzTAP reports are available to view and download at www.arizona.uli.org.

ULI AzTAP Committee

Committee Leadership

Liz Lonetti, Committee Chair
Designer
Espiritu Loci

Cameron Carter, Committee Vice Chair
Partner
Rose Law Group

Rina Rien, Committee Vice Chair
Executive Director
Pinal Partnership

Lance Ross, Committee Emeritus
President
Ross Property Advisers

Committee Members

Lindsey Brist
SW Business Development Manager
MMR Constructors

Mark Davis
Owner
48 Development Company

Denise Dunlop
Landscape Architect
Lokahi Group

Angie Grendahl, MRED
Vice President – Real Estate Development
IONNA

Han Han
Real Estate Development
Pasternack Properties

Benjamin Hernandez, MRED
Project Analyst
Seven League Ventures, LLC

Marlene Imirzian
President
Marlene Imirzian & Associates Architects

Mike James
Development Associate
Wood Partners

Lance Ross, Committee Emeritus
President
Ross Property Advisers

Gabriel Jaramillo
Director of Healthy Communities
Vitalyst Health Foundation

Melissa Johnson*
Director of Business Development & Marketing
Danson Construction

Brent Powers
Attorney
Tiffany & Bosco, P.A.

Judie Scalise
Principal
ESI Corporation

** Special thanks to ULI AzTAP Committee Member Melissa Johnson for being the Lead for this AzTAP.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A dedicated team from the Town of Sahuarita was instrumental in making this AzTAP a reality. ULI Arizona gratefully acknowledges them for their enthusiasm, support and commitment throughout this process.

In addition, ULI AzTAP Committee members conducted interviews with stakeholders to help the Panelists learn about the experiences, needs and opportunities in the Town of Sahuarita. We extend our gratitude as we recognize the stakeholders listed below for providing input.

Town of Sahuarita Team

Victor Gonzalez

Economic Development & Public
Affairs Director

Alex Magallanes

Economic Development Specialist

Stakeholders

Lori Brown

Town of Sahuarita Planning &
Zoning Commission

Eric Burkett

Global Water Resources

Tim Campbell

Crown Arizona

Anna Casadei

Town of Sahuarita

Shane Dille

Town of Sahuarita

Vice Mayor Kara Egbert

Town of Sahuarita

Mark Ferguson

Town of Sahuarita Planning &
Zoning Commission

Dan Morse

Global Water Resources

Mayor Tom Murphy

Town of Sahuarita

Jeremy Sharpe

Rancho Sahuarita

Devin Stalder

Town of Sahuarita Parks &
Recreation

Town Council

Kara Egbert

Vice Mayor

Steven Gillespie

Council Member

Kim Lisk

Council Member

Edgar Lytle

Council Member

Deborah Morales

Council Member

Tom Murphy

Mayor

Diane Priolo

Council Member

Town of Sahuarita AzTAP Panelists



Steve Betts - Moderator

Managing Director, Development
Holualoa Companies

Joshua Bowman

Chief Strategy Officer
City of Maricopa

Aaron Cooper

Executive Director
International Sonoran Desert Alliance

Linda Morales, AICP

Chief Executive Officer
The Planning Center

David Roderique

Deputy City Manager
City of Buckeye, AZ

Jon Vlaming

Principal
Stella Polaris LLC

Jesse Westad, PLA, ASLA

Principal
WERK | urban design

AzTAP Writer: T VanHook Schuld

Study Focus Area

The Town of Sahuarita partnered with ULI Arizona's Technical Assistance Program (AzTAP) to develop strategic, implementation-focused recommendations to guide the future of Parcel 30 and the La Villita Community Center. This effort is centered on identifying how Town-owned land can be leveraged to support recreation-driven development, enhance quality of life, and strengthen Sahuarita's position within the greater Tucson region.

Parcel 30 represents a significant opportunity to translate long-standing planning efforts into action. While previous initiatives, including the 2017 Town Center Vision and subsequent planning studies, established broad goals for the area, community feedback and market conditions have continued to evolve. The Town is now focused on advancing a clear, achievable strategy that prioritizes recreation, community gathering, and complementary economic development uses.

To support this effort, a multidisciplinary Panel of industry experts convened in Sahuarita to evaluate the site and explore development opportunities. The Panel's work was organized around three core topic areas that guided discussion and informed the recommendations presented in this report.

- **Guiding Development:** How can the study area be strategically positioned by assessing its strengths, community needs, recreation opportunities, land use balance, potential anchor partners, and long-term tourism and economic impacts to create a successful and sustainable regional destination?
- **Balanced Land Use and Design:** How can the site be designed and phased to create a recreation-focused destination that is connected, sustainable, and future-ready while balancing land uses, sense of place, design standards, infrastructure, and multi-modal linkages to meet both community and environmental needs?
- **Development and RFP Strategies:** What development strategies, financial tools, and partnership models can best position the Town to attract private investment, guide an effective RFP process, and ensure the long-term success of a recreation-led project on publicly owned land?

History



Approximately 15 miles south of Tucson in the Santa Cruz River Valley, the Town of Sahuarita is steeped in a rich agricultural history dating back thousands of years to when the Hohokam developed agricultural irrigation systems to support cultivation in the desert environment. Formally founded in 1911, Sahuarita retained its rural character for much of the 20th century before incorporating as a town in 1994.

For much of its early history, Sahuarita's economy has been tied to agriculture, ranching, and later mining activities in the surrounding area. Development remained limited and dispersed. Housing clusters (early colonia neighborhoods) developed near agricultural operations and along transportation corridors including Interstate 19 and the Old Nogales Highway. Commercial activity was minimal and primarily served town residents and their rural neighbors, while many services and employment opportunities were primarily found in Tucson to the north and Green Valley or Nogales to the south.

One of five incorporated jurisdictions in the Tucson Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), Sahuarita has worked to distinguish itself by creating a sense of place through planning and design for roadways and public facilities.

As the development of planned communities took hold and new home production soared, the Town designed and built a municipal complex with centralized services to meet growing needs. Additionally, it began providing services and building amenities focused on the increasing number of residents and growing workforce needed to support new housing and commercial development.



The Town operates a variety of public amenities, community centers, parks, and ball fields, and established an active partnership with the school district to utilize shared facilities when appropriate.

Despite significant investment in local facilities, many youth still struggle to find welcoming spaces and healthy activities. The community center lacks sufficient space and programming to meet the demand from young people seeking a place to gather or participate in organized activities.

Many of the sports fields, public facilities and other resources operate at full capacity. For example, popular pickleball courts have extended hours, with demand exceeding availability and reservations constantly booked out far in advance. Sahuarita is taking steps to address the need for additional recreational activities in order to increase opportunities for its residents, specifically seniors and school-aged youth with limited options.

Alongside housing, developers of new planned communities have added numerous amenities - including pools, parks and community facilities - but these are limited to residents of specific neighborhoods. Many of these new neighborhoods and their amenities are concentrated in the northern part of the Town.



Population Growth

Since incorporation, Sahuarita has experienced substantial population growth, transforming from a small rural community into one of the fastest growing municipalities in southern Arizona. The Town has grown by 862% since the 2000 census, a population increase from just over 3,000 residents in 2000 to more than 34,000 by 2020, with continued growth in the years since. This rapid increase in population is driven largely by residential development and regional growth pressures within the Tucson MSA.

Current population estimates (2024–2025), project Sahuarita’s population at approximately 37,000 residents, reflecting continued growth.

Population Growth Since Incorporation

- 1994–2000: Rural
 - Population steady around 3,242
 - Newly incorporated - largely rural
- 2000–2010: Explosive suburban expansion
 - Population surges to 26,268
 - The initial master-planned community development, new schools, and rapid in migration
- 2010–2020: Continued strong growth
 - Population 34,356
 - Slow robust growth
- 2020–2026: Renewed acceleration
 - Projected population 38,994
 - Ongoing housing development

Shifting Demographics

Sahuarita’s growth has been accompanied by considerable shifts in age demographics. The community has maintained a relatively young median age—approximately mid 30s—reflecting its strong appeal to families and working age households. At the same time, the Town has seen a steady increase in older adults, with residents aged 65 and over now comprising more than one fifth of the population. This evolving age profile highlights Sahuarita’s dual role as a family-oriented community and an increasingly attractive location for aging residents seeking suburban amenities and quality of life.

The median household income is approximately \$104,000, well above county and state averages. Despite this overall affluence, an estimated 8–9 percent of households live below the poverty line, and child poverty rates are approximately 10 percent, well below the Tucson MSA rate of 14.4%, yet an indication of economic disparities within the community.

Sahuarita has undergone one of the most dramatic educational shifts in southern Arizona. Over the past 30 years, it has moved from a small rural town with modest education levels to a high-education, high-income suburban community with nearly half of adults holding a college degree. Approximately 95 percent of adults age 25 and older hold a high school diploma or higher, and roughly 44 percent have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, supporting a skilled workforce and contributing to the Town’s economic stability and attractiveness to employers.



Master-Planned Communities

Following incorporation in 1994, Sahuarita experienced rapid residential growth, driven in part by rapid population growth in the Tucson MSA, improved access via Interstate 19, and demand for affordable, family-oriented housing. In the early 2000s, housing costs throughout Arizona, especially in the state's two largest cities, drove homebuyers further out of the core metropolitan area and into communities where developers with master-planned residential neighborhoods were rapidly moving to address shortages and provide alternatives.

Like its counterparts in the area, Marana and Oro Valley, Sahuarita's rural agricultural lifestyle began to change as large-scale, master-planned communities, including Rancho Sahuarita, Madera Highlands, and Quail Creek started to dominate the once undeveloped and agricultural properties along major transportation corridors. Neighborhoods within these communities consist of predominately single-family housing units in a uniform development pattern with landscaping, open areas, and amenities fostering a family environment.

Sahuarita is a largely owner-occupied community with relatively small numbers of aging housing stock. Notably, more than 80 percent of Sahuarita's housing units were constructed after 2000, reflecting rapid residential growth associated with master-planned community development and suburban expansion patterns seen in Arizona during this time.

Development Patterns



Emphasizing housing and a family centered lifestyle, Sahuarita's master-planned communities brought with them a suburban development pattern dominated by single-family housing, neighborhood amenities, recreation centers, schools, and integrated open space. As a result, Sahuarita evolved primarily as a residential community with a strong identity as a place to live rather than a center of employment.

For much of its recent history, Sahuarita has functioned as a bedroom community, with a significant share of residents commuting to Tucson, Green Valley, and other regional employment centers for work, entertainment, recreation and hospitality amenities. Commercial development in the Town has followed residential expansion. Retail and service uses have concentrated along major arterial roadways and been designed to meet the daily needs of residents, including grocery stores, pharmacies, and neighborhood shopping centers. Big box and grocery-anchored retail centers emerged to serve the growing population, but commercial development remained auto-oriented and physically separated from residential areas, reinforcing Sahuarita's role as a place to find housing rather than an employment center.

Local employment opportunities (non-agriculture) have primarily concentrated in retail, education, healthcare, government, and other service sectors supporting the growing residential population.

Economic Growth

In recent years, the Town of Sahuarita has taken deliberate steps to broaden its economic base and diversify beyond residential growth. Adopted in 2024, the Sahuarita Economic Development P3 Master Plan lays out a framework for economic activities articulated as three priority goals and a detailed set of prioritized strategic objectives placing people, prosperity, and place at the core. The plan describes a strategic framework recognizing identity, growth, and regional status as the guiding principles driving economic development programs, policies, and initiatives.

Economic development efforts have focused on attracting higher-wage employment, expanding local business opportunities, and strengthening the town's identity within the Tucson region. Key initiatives include investment in employment areas, partnerships with educational institutions, and development of advanced manufacturing and technology facilities. These initiatives are intended to reduce commuter dependence, improve job-housing balance, and support long-term fiscal sustainability while continuing to serve the needs of Sahuarita's growing and increasingly diverse workforce.

Today, Sahuarita is transitioning from a primarily residential suburb into a more complete community with a growing mix of housing, commercial, civic, and employment uses. While master-planned residential neighborhoods continue to define much of the town's physical form, recent planning initiatives emphasize place-making, economic diversification, and the creation of local destinations that strengthen community identity and quality of life.

This evolution reflects Sahuarita's broader goal of managing growth while preserving its heritage and enhancing long-term economic resilience. The development of Parcel 30 represents one of the Town's most significant opportunities to translate long-standing community plans into visible, catalytic development.



Development Strategies



Maximizing the opportunities presented by the development of Parcel 30 centers on establishing a unique place that leverages local demographics and prioritizes family-friendly amenities to attract both residents and visitors. The strategies outlined in this report focus on creating a cohesive, connected environment that integrates a community gathering space, a commercial center, a family entertainment zone and a hospitality area. While economic growth and long-term stability are embedded throughout, it remains essential that the project delivers affordable and diverse recreational options that serve families across a wide range of income levels.

In addition, Parcel 30 includes designated areas for future economic development (Area 3), which present an opportunity to attract employment-generating uses that complement the recreation-focused vision. These areas should be reserved and positioned to support long-term job creation, diversify the Town's economic base and strengthen the overall viability of the site without competing with its primary identity as a family-oriented destination.

The scale and location of Parcel 30 provide a unique opportunity for Sahuarita to leverage an already secured asset without burdensome holding costs or mandated timelines. As landholder, the Town is in a strong position to shape outcomes, but that role also requires a deliberate and strategic approach to deploying public resources. The success of a large, multi-phase development will depend on balanced public and private investment, carefully sequenced to build momentum and reinforce long-term value.

With this framework established, the following section outlines the key priorities identified by the Panel to guide implementation and move the vision for Parcel 30 into action.

Priorities

The Town as Master Developer

Sahuarita should establish itself as the master developer for Parcel 30 and the adjacent properties, positioning itself to drive overall vision, set priorities, and manage resources. The undertaking is massive and will require a long-term commitment to providing the resources and oversight necessary to coordinate planning, implementation, marketing/branding projects over time and through various development stages.

The Town's investment may be most effective when it establishes the foundation for private sector confidence. Early investments—such as land control, infrastructure installation, utility extensions, environmental and archaeological clearances, and the creation of high-quality public spaces—reduce uncertainty and lower risk for private developers. These upfront investments will indicate that the Town holds a long-term commitment, is demonstrating readiness, and has established a clear vision that the private market can respond to.

Private investment, in turn, is essential for scale, vitality, and long-term economic sustainability. Commercial development, entertainment uses, hospitality, and employment-generating projects support the tax base, create activity, and generate revenue streams that can help fund subsequent public improvements. Private investment will follow—not lead—early public commitments. Without visible progress and predictable conditions, private partners are likely to delay or lose interest in the project.

Timing is as important as the investment itself. If Sahuarita initiates too many projects without securing an additional funding source (such as GO bonds or special funding districts), it may strain financial capacity, dilute impact, and increase public scrutiny. Waiting too long for private participation can stall momentum and erode public confidence. The most successful approach may be to concentrate early public investment on a small number of catalytic, community-facing projects to create immediate visibility and momentum. As these projects begin to perform—through increased visitation, event activity, or early commercial success—the Town can strategically introduce private development opportunities through phased Requests for Qualifications (RFQs) or Requests for Proposals (RFPs).

By sequencing investment in this way, the Town maximizes the return on public dollars while creating a clear, credible pathway for private partners. Acting as master developer allows the Town to coordinate land use, control phasing, and align infrastructure with market readiness, ensuring that each investment builds upon the last. Over time, this deliberate choreography of public and private roles transforms individual projects into a cohesive, financially sustainable district that reflects community priorities and delivers lasting economic and social value.

Year	2050
	2045
	2040
	2035
	2030
	2026

Playing the Long Game

Getting the mix and timing of public and private investment right is not just a financial necessity, it directly determines whether a large development effort succeeds or stalls.

Developing a community-focused regionally significant economic center with a distinct sense of place requires planning, time, and multiple layers of public and private investment. It is important that Sahuarita’s policymakers and public understand that building out of the facilities and amenities along with the engagement of private partners is a long-term proposition and that timing each area of development is critical.

When the Town invests first and invests wisely, it reduces risk for private developers. Infrastructure, site readiness, established transportation corridors, and visible public amenities make development more predictable and more attractive. Private investors are far more likely to participate when they see that the Town has “skin in the game” and a clear long-term plan.

At the same time, public investment alone cannot carry a project to full build-out. Public investment unlocks opportunities for the private sector to invest in ventures that expand services, provide, entertainment, create jobs, in the long-term generate tax revenue that allows the Town to reinvest in parks, facilities, and community programs. The goal is not public versus private investment—but public investment that unlocks private investment.

Timing is what connects the two. If the Town’s investment is spread too thin or delivered out of sequence, it may fail to generate momentum. If private development is engaged too early, before infrastructure and amenities are in place, or get caught up in entitlement or plan review projects may struggle or investors exhaust resources before projects can be completed. Concentrating early efforts, proving success, and then scaling up allows each initiative area to build confidence for the next.

For the Town serving as master developer and primary land holder, this approach provides the greatest leverage. It allows the Town to lead with vision, control quality, and pace development responsibly—while still relying on private partners to deliver scale, innovation, and long-term economic return. When done correctly, the result is not just development, but a durable, community-driven destination that grows stronger over time.

Building an Effective Team

The Town of Sahuarita serving as master developer will require patience and focus, dedicated internal staffing, the expertise of contract consultants to guide strategy and develop partnerships, and strong community buy-in and participation.



It is critical to overall success that Sahuarita maintain capacity for a designated staff member (at least one directly assigned position) responsible for coordination of implementation efforts. As initiatives progress and become more complex, this role provides a consistent point of contact, helping sustain continuity and accountability throughout the development process. By entrusting oversight to a specific individual, the Town can effectively track progress, address challenges promptly, and maintain integrity from initiation through completion.

To successfully advance multiple development efforts, Sahuarita must assemble a team with the appropriate expertise and a diverse skill set. As the site builds out and individual components move forward, the composition of the team should be evaluated regularly to ensure staff have the knowledge, capabilities, and tools needed to respond to evolving demands. Aligning the right people and resources with each initiative strengthens the Town's ability to meet its strategic goals and deliver successful outcomes at every stage.

Engaging qualified development consultants to bring specialized expertise and established networks across key industries will be essential to Sahuarita's economic development objectives. These consultants will play a critical role in advancing key components such as family entertainment, hospitality, public facilities, and business recruitment. Working closely with the Town's team, they will guide land planning, coordinate timelines, and ensure all efforts align with the Town's strategic vision. By leveraging industry knowledge and relationships, consultants can help attract targeted investment and support the successful execution of complex, multi-phase development.

Community Engagement in Planning



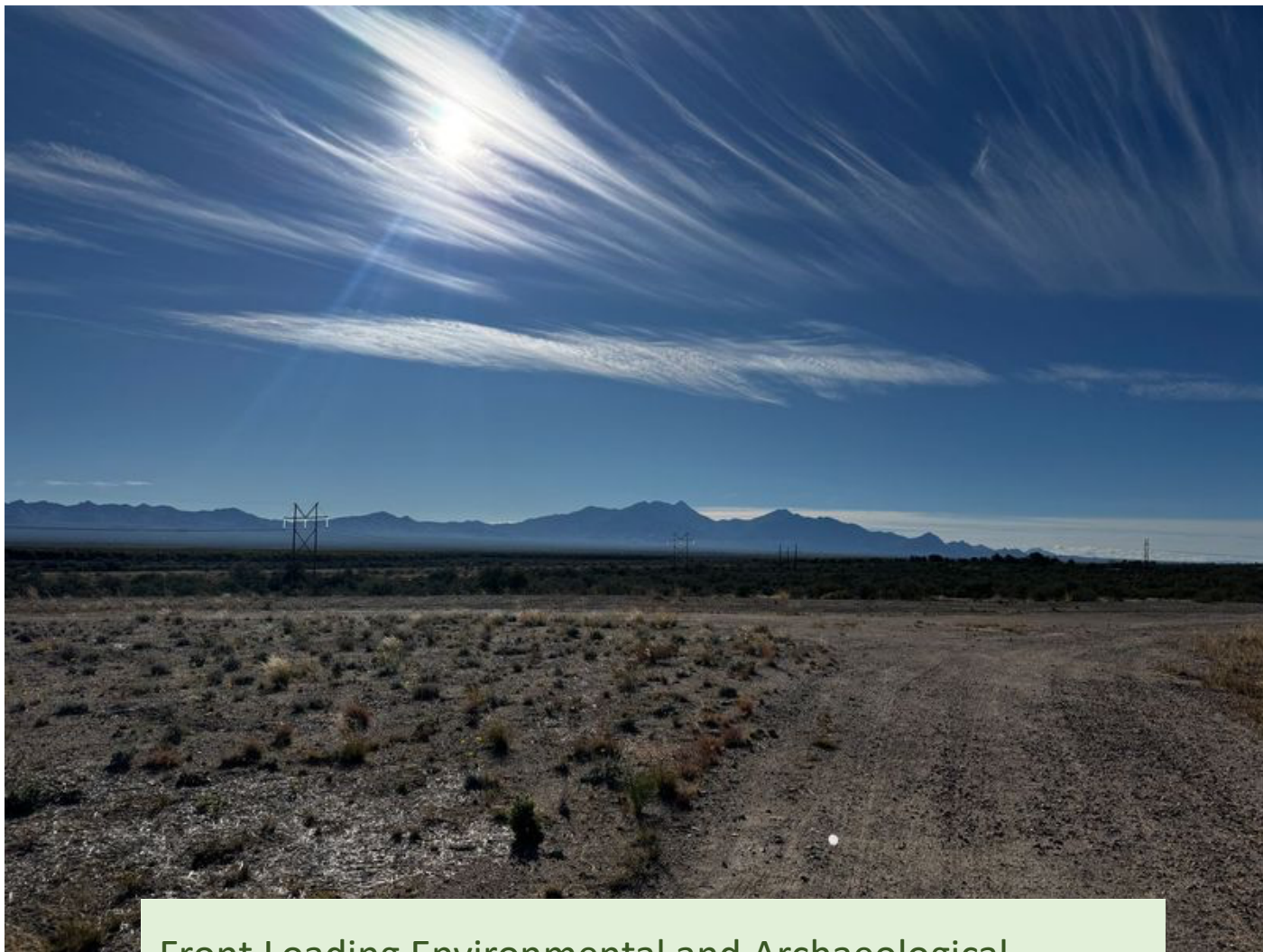
By making community engagement a cornerstone of the planning process, Sahuarita can build trust, encourage collaboration, and ensure that the community embraces the phased development of Parcel 30.

Over the long term, Sahuarita's vision will require an investment beyond the use of public land and the Town's financial resources – it will require public support and community buy-in, starting with the concept of doing things over time. Project outcomes will depend on fostering a neighborly environment from the preliminary stages of planning, through the review and approval processes and vendor and partnership selection, to build out and eventually ongoing maintenance.

Building trust within the community is fundamental. Strategic planning should be guided by lessons learned from the region's recent failed bond initiatives and should actively engage community members in meaningful conversations.

Planning activities centered around site specific planning, placement and types of public amenities and facilities, the size and location of public gathering spaces, and discussions involving parking requirements are all wonderful places to engage the public about the larger ideas. Actively involving residents in community-focused decisions ensures that the final outcomes reflect the true needs and desires of the people who will use these facilities most.

Gathering input from the community through wish lists and feedback mechanisms allows the Town to create spaces that foster a sense of belonging, enhance usability, and generate lasting support for development initiatives. Early communication provides front-end education laying seeds for future funding asks, such as general obligation bonds or the creation of special funding districts.



Front Loading Environmental and Archaeological Surveys

To optimize opportunities and attract investors, Sahuarita should take proactive steps to front load tasks that might cause costly delays later. It is critical to initiate (at least initial) archaeological and environmental surveys before any development activities begin.

Conducting these surveys early on helps avoid costly mistakes and unnecessary expenses as ideas become reality. This proactive approach minimizes project delays and ensures compliance, enabling the development process to proceed smoothly and efficiently.

When federal funds are involved, all mandated environmental assessments and mitigation plans must be completed prior to advancing development.

Connectivity By Design

By making community engagement a cornerstone of the planning process, Sahuarita can build trust, encourage collaboration, and ensure that the community embraces the phased development of Parcel 30.

Development planning should emphasize both internal, multi-modal transportation options to enhance connectivity and accessibility across the site. An additional roadway connecting east and west may be needed along with improvements to La Villita and El Toro Roads.

The Panel recommends strategies for optimizing connectivity and encouraging multi-modal transportation options:

1. Maximize parking by placing it along the outer ring of each development area and adjacent to external access routes. Parking needs to connect between areas allowing overflow parking from one to the next while retaining easy access to venues and attractions. The existing powerline corridor could be used for parking, freeing up more commercially viable areas for other uses.
2. Install a multi-level wayfinding system to improve navigation and encourage exploration of community spaces.
3. Prioritize a human-oriented environment rather than one dominated by vehicles. Internal pathways should link to regional networks, such as the Juan Bautista trail and other established routes, further expanding pedestrian and bike access and supporting active transportation within the broader community.
4. Deploy solutions such as light signals or High-intensity Activated crossWalk (HAWK) beacons. By prioritizing these interventions, the Town can reduce risks and ensure safe passage for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists navigating areas where transportation modes converge.
5. Promote safety where vehicle, pedestrian, and cycling traffic intersect with the railroad. To protect all users at these interfaces, appropriate safety measures must be implemented.

Prioritizing Community Needs

Although long-term investment may result in Parcel 30 emerging as a regional recreation center, it is important to prioritize community needs over regional recreation initiatives, emphasizing the need for inclusive facilities that cater to all residents, not just organized sports teams.

While the Town's recent acquisition and activation of the La Villita Community Center has meaningfully improved access to recreation and community space, it does not fully address the Town's growing and



increasingly diverse needs. Existing facilities are operating at or near capacity, and access remains uneven across various parts of the community. As Sahuarita continues to grow, additional recreational infrastructure is needed to close remaining gaps, expand capacity, and ensure equitable access for residents on both sides of Sahuarita Road.

Meeting the demand for public facilities and activities for youth is priority. Designing flexibility into development plans will allow facilities to grow in phases and pivot to address shifting interests and community demands. If demand continues, venues can be expanded to serve a larger regional base, but the primary focus has to be meeting local needs.

A community first approach builds trust and creates awareness, making it easier for the Town to allocate funding while demonstrating its commitment to community members. Initiatives should include branding, park improvements such as tree replanting, and innovative uses for small public spaces to enhance community engagement.

Establishing Development Areas



The Panel discussion focused on splitting Parcel 30 into five distinct development areas, each designed to be manageable and achievable on its own. Phasing development in this manner makes it easier to plan, fund, implement, and adjust from lessons learned. This approach also allows the Town to demonstrate success and celebrate milestones with the community, ensuring high visibility of the Town's success to encourage ongoing support and future investment.

Development is approached incrementally, with each phase building on the achievements of the previous one. This strategy allows for flexibility, ongoing evaluation, and the ability to make adjustments based on community needs, usage patterns, and feedback as each area is developed and activated.

These areas include:

Area 1 - Community Gathering Spaces (15+/- acres)

Area 2 – Outdoor Recreation (73+/- acres)

Area 3 –Commercial Investment Zone (40+/- acres)

Area 4 – Family Entertainment District (52+/- acres)

Area 5 – Hotel and Hospitality (45+/- acres)

The map on the next page provides a general overview showing the location and relationship of each development area to one another and to the Town itself. The placement of the areas is clearly identified, helping to visualize how the different concepts are distributed across the site. In addition, the map suggests the proposed layout for roadways, supporting accessibility and connectivity throughout the planned development.

Map Showing Areas 1-5



Area 1 – Community Gathering Spaces (15+/- acres)

Area 1 is in the perfect location for expanding recreational facilities, including a new community and aquatic center. The Town-owned land sits directly south of La Villita on Sahuarita Road with a subterranean access point (underpass) providing a direct connection between the two properties. Easy pedestrian access will promote shared parking, while safe access encourages movement between venues creating synergy and helping generate the critical mass of people needed to encourage private investment.



Prioritizing the creation of community gatherings spaces anchored by a band shell, open lawn, and shaded areas provides an ideal focus for public investment to serve as a catalyst for social connection, civic pride, and everyday activity. When paired with flexible spaces for food trucks, farmers markets, and local vendors, the destination becomes more than a venue—it becomes the heart of the community.

The existing underpass connection is essential to providing functional access across Town-owned properties while maximizing long-term public benefit. It allows the Town to unify recreation, civic and educational assets into a connected system rather than a series of isolated facilities. As a critical piece of infrastructure, the underpass enables safe, continuous movement between the school campus, municipal center, existing community center and future facilities to the south. Strengthening and enhancing this connection increases overall system capacity by allowing these assets to function together, distributing use more efficiently and reducing pressure on any single site.

With most of Area 1 dedicated to outdoor recreation, it is essential to ensure a balanced approach to land use and design. The plan should prioritize ample outdoor spaces while also incorporating an indoor recreation center, allowing for year-round activities regardless of weather conditions.

Planning for the recreation center, which ideally includes a pool, should be structured as a phased project. Initial steps can focus on site preparation and basic amenities, with future phases adding more comprehensive recreation facilities. Funding may be secured through a future bond or as a phased initiative supported by Transaction Privilege Tax (TPT) revenue generated from the surrounding commercial development.

Incorporating a central public gathering place is important to enhance connectivity throughout the site and foster a powerful sense of community. A band shell surrounded by grass and trees provides a welcoming, informal setting for live music, performances, movie nights, cultural celebrations, and seasonal events. The open lawn allows families to gather casually, children to play, and neighbors to interact in ways that are accessible, inclusive, and low-cost. Shade trees and simple shade structures are particularly critical in southern Arizona, extending the usability of the space throughout the year and reinforcing comfort, sustainability, and long-term enjoyment.

Designated areas for food trucks, farmers markets, and other vendors add vitality and flexibility while supporting local entrepreneurs. These uses create regular reasons to visit the site, transforming it into an active destination during evenings and weekends and fostering a sense of routine and belonging. Markets and vendor events also strengthen Sahuarita's economic circulation by providing small businesses with visibility and low-barrier entry into the community marketplace.

Creation of a commercial kitchen or pantry at the La Villita Community Center or another location would provide broader access for local entrepreneurs and support pop-up vendors.



When programming is intentionally family-oriented, the gathering space becomes intergenerational. Parents, children, seniors, and teens can all share the same environment while participating in activities that feel welcoming and safe. This shared experience builds social cohesion and reinforces the idea that space belongs to everyone.

Integrating shared parking with nearby amenities such as playgrounds and splash pads further enhances the efficiency and appeal of the site. Families can park once and access multiple destinations, encouraging longer stays and repeat visits. Children can move easily between active play and passive activities, while caregivers benefit from clear sightlines and convenient access. Shared parking also reduces land devoted solely to vehicles, allowing more space for landscaping, programming, and people-focused design.

Together, these elements—music, shade, food, play, and flexible gathering space—create a highly adaptable civic asset that can evolve over time. The result is a place that supports daily use as well as special events, strengthens community identity, and provides visible, immediate benefits that build momentum for future investment.

Area 2 – Outdoor Recreation (73+/- acres)



By prioritizing people centered design and shared experiences, the Town can establish a welcoming destination that reflects community values and fosters lasting connections across all ages.

Area 2 stretches diagonally across the width of Parcel 30 starting in the northeast corner and extending southwest for approximately 73 acres to the railroad line. Currently hosting the Man in the Maze Trail Park (I'itoi Trails Park), a disc golf course and small sliver of conservation land, the area is well suited for outdoor-oriented recreation that builds on Sahuarita's growing biking, hiking, and trail-use culture.

This area presents an opportunity to establish a network of trails and supporting amenities that connect residents to regional open space while reinforcing the site's role as a destination for everyday recreation and active lifestyles.

A trailhead at the entry point in the far northeast corner of Parcel 30 would provide a welcoming gateway for both active and passive recreational activities by providing easy access to trails and walking paths.

The installation of trailhead amenities, parking, restrooms, shaded seating, potable water stations, wayfinding, bike racks, and small gathering area will create a destination while providing for visitor comfort. The trailhead's proximity to Area 1 parking helps accommodate overflow and reduce informal parking.

Easy access from La Villita Road makes the trailhead location prime for phasing in privately-owned uses that support outdoor adventure. As the number of visitors and uses expands, the introduction of outdoor-focused enterprises such as a bike shop and/or coffee shop would complement existing recreational activities, provide additional gathering spaces and solidify Area 2 as a destination for both casual users and more dedicated cyclists and hikers, encouraging repeat use and extending the length of visits.

The existing electric easement along the eastern edge of the site offers an important opportunity to establish multi-use paths that safely accommodate walking, biking, and other non-motorized activities. These paths can function as both recreational routes and connective infrastructure, linking the site to the Juan Bautista Trail and other regional trail systems. Strengthening these connections expands the Town’s trail network, improves access to open space, and positions the site as a key node within a larger regional recreation framework.

Additional trail connections should extend west and south into on-site amenities, including disc golf, preserved open space areas, and a dedicated adventure play area. These connections allow users to move seamlessly between active recreation, passive open space, and family-oriented play environments. An adventure play area—designed with natural materials, varied terrain, and age-appropriate challenges—adds an experiential element that complements the trail system and encourages longer stays for families.

By clustering the trailheads, path, and outdoor recreation amenities within Area 2, the Town can create a cohesive outdoor recreation zone that supports healthy lifestyles, attracts a broad range of users, and minimizes the need for intensive development. This area functions as a natural transition between community-focused spaces and a future family entertainment and commercial development area while preserving open land, reinforcing environmental stewardship and delivering meaningful recreational value.

Retaining a flexible approach supports balanced investment principles, builds on existing assets, provides a lower cost high impact public win, and strengthens Sahuarita’s identity as a community that values outdoor access, active living, and connection to its natural landscape.



Phased Development

Carving out additional unpaved trails is a cost-effective way to provide safe and convenient routes for pedestrians and cyclists and generate early momentum. Over time, trail improvements and amenities should evolve incrementally as funding becomes available.



Providing Shade

One of the most cost-effective impacts Sahuarita could have on the project area is to provide shade. Shade is essential for year-round use of outdoor amenities, including Man in the Maze Trail Park (I'itoi Trails Park) and the disc golf course. Fostering a variety of shade options not only increases comfort for visitors but also extends the usability of recreational spaces during warmer periods.

Erecting shade structures where needed will offer immediate relief and protection for visitors. Over time, planting trees in targeted areas provides natural shade and contributes to the overall landscape aesthetics. Incorporating passive water use reduces long-term maintenance costs and fosters sustainability. These strategies work together to create inviting spaces, promote environmental stewardship, and support the comfort and enjoyment of users.

Area 3 – Commercial Investment Zone (40+/- acres)



Separated from Areas 1 and 2 by an active railroad spur, Area 3 is a key component in creating a long-term sustainable area. Area 3 is the strategic set-aside of an economic development parcel intended for future employment-generating uses. Setting aside land for this purpose ensures that long-term job creation remains a core objective of the overall development, rather than being displaced by short-term commercial pressures.

Having land set aside in Area 3 provides flexibility to respond to future market opportunities, whether through commercial office, innovation, hospitality-related employment, or other uses that align with the Town's economic development goals.

Temporary Uses

In the short term, land set aside for future development can serve as sites for interim recreational and commercial uses, such as paintball and other activities that do not require extensive site investment and can operate under short-term leases. These temporary uses could generate revenue for the Town and help raise public awareness of ongoing and future investments within the area. By activating the parcels with engaging activities, the Town fosters community interest and utilization, which can support long-term development goals. Short-term leasing strategies also provide flexibility, allowing the Town to adapt to changing market conditions while maintaining consistent activity and visibility on the site.

Area 4 – Family Entertainment District (52+/- acres)



Area 4 is envisioned as the next phase of development, building on the energy and activity generated by the community-focused investments in Areas 1 and 2. While Areas 1 and 2 establish the heart of the site by providing public access for recreation and gathering, Area 4 is intended to support a complementary entertainment-oriented and economic development district.

Developing the area with a mix of family-oriented commercial uses, including dining, indoor and outdoor recreation, event-based attractions, and destination-style entertainment, will require strong public-private partnerships. Expanding beyond serving the local community, attractions in this zone are designed to serve both residents and visitors, providing options that activate the site during evenings and weekends while reinforcing Sahuarita's identity as a welcoming, family-friendly community. By clustering entertainment and commercial activity within a defined area, Area 4 creates a walkable, lively environment developed and operated by commercial partners.



Attraction concepts include a recreational driving range, bowling, and pickleball (programmed for drop-in play, leagues, and tournaments), along with a combination café or brewery paired with dog social spaces (indoor/outdoor dog park) that encourage longer dwell times and repeat visitation. These uses work best when presented as a curated mix that activates evenings and weekends, supports a consistent flow of customers, and creates the “critical mass” private partners look for when evaluating entertainment-oriented districts.



Identifying and selecting the appropriate representation to market the district to companies with experience in developing family-oriented entertainment is key for success. It is essential to engage a commercial development advisor (consultant) early in the planning process to assist with the overall layout of the area and foster the relationships needed to engage private investment in Area 4.



Area 4’s value proposition is its ability to broaden regional appeal, extend visitor stays, and strengthen long-term fiscal sustainability by clustering complementary experiences in a single, walkable district.



To encourage private investment, Sahuarita should provide low-cost long-term leases for ready-to-build sites, utility and roadway infrastructure, and priority (fast track) permitting opportunities, reducing both development and operational expenses.

Marketing materials and outreach should emphasize that Area 4 is intended to function as a cohesive district—where entertainment, food and beverage, and complementary commercial

activity reinforce each other—rather than as isolated pads. Positioning the area this way helps communicate to prospective operators and developers that the Town is intentionally creating the conditions for sustained foot traffic, repeat trips, and cross-shopping, which strengthens tenant performance and reduces investor risk.

Active recruitment should reinforce the Town’s commitment to sequencing and connectivity so that Area 4 leverages momentum from earlier public investments and delivers a clear pathway for private participation. In other words, Area 4 should be marketed not only as “available land,” but as the next step in a coordinated place-based strategy designed to convert community activity into private market demand.

The timing of Area 4 development is critical. Private investment in entertainment, dining, and employment uses is most likely to occur after the Town has demonstrated success through early public investment and visible activity in Areas 1 and 2. As the community gathering spaces, recreation facilities, and events begin to attract consistent use, Area 4 becomes increasingly attractive to private partners seeking locations with established foot traffic, a clear vision, and supportive infrastructure. In this way, Area 4 is positioned as a logical next step—one that leverages momentum rather than attempting to create it independently.

Design and access should reinforce connectivity to the other development areas. Pedestrian paths, shared parking strategies, and coordinated site planning should allow visitors to move easily between recreation, gathering spaces, entertainment uses, and future employment areas. This integration encourages longer visits, supports multiple user types, and helps the overall development function as a cohesive district rather than isolated projects.

By clearly defining Area 4 as an entertainment and economic development area—and by sequencing its implementation after early catalytic investments, the Town can balance community benefit with revenue generation. Area 4 plays a critical role in translating public investment into private participation, helping to fund future improvements while delivering jobs, services, and amenities that support Sahuarita’s long-term vision as a complete, connected, and resilient community. Ideally, once fully built out and operating, the commercial enterprises focused on family entertainment will generate enough revenue to support public investments that improve the quality of life for all Sahuarita residents. Public investment comes full circle.

Area 5 – Hotel and Hospitality (45+/- acres)



Area 5 is located in the southernmost corner of Parcel 30 and is designated for hotel and hospitality uses. Connectivity within the planning area presents an opportunity to provide overnight accommodations that support events, conventions, and sporting events, and serve as an additional gathering place for meetings, as well as weekend getaways for family fun.

Area 5 will foster synergy with the surrounding outdoor recreation and family entertainment areas. By supporting these amenities, the hotel and hospitality zone helps to create a cohesive and vibrant district, encouraging longer visits and offering a comprehensive experience for a diverse range of guests.

This synergy adds further support to family entertainment and other uses, reinforcing the district's connectivity and vibrancy. The integration of hotel and hospitality facilities is intended to strengthen the development's appeal, building on the energy generated by community-focused investments in earlier phases and establishing Area 5 as a key economic development destination within the district.

Hotel visibility from and direct access to I-19 are key feasibility factors that will materially influence market performance, developer interest, and long-term viability. Strong interstate

visibility increases brand recognition, captures commuter attention and signals ease of access for visitors looking for lodging options along the corridor between Mexico and the Tucson MSA.

From a feasibility standpoint, sites that combine interstate exposure with convenient access are more competitive, reduce marketing risk for operators, and improve underwriting assumptions related to demand capture, operating efficiency, and long-term asset value.

Casino Connectivity

Located on I-19 just one exit north of Sahuarita Road, the Desert Diamond Casino brings visitors to the Sahuarita community to enjoy concerts and events, dining, and gaming. There are currently no hotel accommodations at the casino. The venue's close proximity to Parcel 30 amenities and future development provides opportunities for both the Town and the Tohono O'odham Nation to work together to increase visitors, extend visitor length of stay and build synergy.

The Town should engage the Nation in the design of the area, actively engage in discussion surrounding hotel development and explore joint ventures and marketing opportunities. This collaboration may be mutually beneficial, supporting joint economic development and improving the overall visitor experience.

Feasibility Study - Hotel Development

Sahuarita should engage a hotel development consultant to guide the process and commission an independent hotel feasibility study. This study will provide objective analysis of market demand, potential sites, and strategic positioning for a new hotel or hotels within the development area.

Once a feasibility study has been completed, Sahuarita should proactively market the opportunity to vetted developers to encourage investment and then initiate a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process to identify and select a qualified hotel development group. The RFQ should be structured to attract applicants with demonstrated experience in hotel planning, development, and operations, ensuring the selected partner aligns with Sahuarita's economic development objectives.

Recommendations

Parcel 30 represents Sahuarita's opportunity to define its identity as a family-first recreation destination for the region.

How the Panel Addressed the Study Focus Areas:

The Panel's discussions across guiding development, land use and design, and implementation strategies revealed a consistent direction for the site.

- **Guiding Development:** Parcel 30 should function as a community-centered recreation destination supported by targeted regional attractions and complementary commercial uses.
- **Balanced Land Use & Design:** The site should be organized into distinct but connected areas anchored by a central gathering space and supported by strong multi-modal access and phased infrastructure.
- **Development & RFP Strategies:** The Town should act as master developer, using phased land leasing, targeted partnerships, and strategic procurement to attract private investment and deliver long-term value.

Together, these findings establish a clear, recreation-led framework for the future of Parcel 30.

Key Priorities to Achieve the Vision

Parcel 30 should evolve into the Family Entertainment Center of the Metro-Tucson Area, serving as a hub for community gathering, recreation, entertainment, hospitality and long-term economic development.

To translate this framework into action, the Panel identified the following priority actions:

1. Go Big on Recreation

Prioritize the development of high-quality public recreational amenities that serve as a primary draw for residents and visitors. Recreation should establish the identity of the site and anchor future development.

2. Establish the Town as the Master Developer

The Town should lead overall vision, coordination and implementation by:

- Assigning dedicated internal staff support
- Engaging a qualified development consultant
- Maintaining control of land through strategic leasing

This approach ensures alignment, consistency and long-term success.

3. Develop a Community Gathering Space as the Catalyst

Initiate development with a central gathering space that functions as the heart of the site. This space should support:

- Events and performances
- Food trucks and markets
- Daily community use

Early activation will establish identity and generate momentum for future phases.

4. Pursue a Recreation Center Through Phased Funding

Plan for a recreation center, ideally including a pool, through a phased approach:

- Explore future bond opportunities
- Leverage TPT revenue generated from surrounding development
- Align timing with demonstrated community demand

This ensures financial feasibility while meeting a clearly identified community need.

5. Create a Defined Entertainment District

Establish a dedicated area for family-oriented commercial uses, including:

- Dining and gathering spaces
- Indoor and outdoor recreation
- Event-driven and destination-style attractions

This district will drive activity, support year-round use and generate revenue to sustain public amenities.

6. Advance Hospitality Through a Hotel Feasibility Study

Commission a third-party hotel feasibility study to determine market viability, scale and positioning. Based on findings:

- Actively pursue hotel development partners
- Support tourism and event activity
- Strengthen regional draw

7. Reserve an Economic Development Parcel for Future Employers

Set aside a dedicated parcel to attract future employers and expand the Town's economic base.

This strategy will:

- Create long-term job opportunities
- Diversify revenue streams
- Support sustained growth beyond recreation uses

Implementation Approach

These priorities should be advanced through a phased, coordinated strategy, beginning with early public investments that catalyze private development and establish Parcel 30 as a recognizable destination.

