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Springdale Chamber Eyes Development

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SPRINGDALE - Cattle-filled fields surrounding Arvest Ballpark may soon give way to restaurants, hotels and other retail venues if the Chamber of Commerce gets its wish.

The Springdale Chamber of Commerce announced progress Thursday on the plans for development around the ballpark. The chamber hired Pizzuti Solutions, the Danter Co. and Hodges and Associates to develop a master plan for the largely undeveloped section of the city.

The plan will include about 1,000 acres bound by U.S. 412 to the north, Interstate 540 to the east, Arkansas 112 to the west and the city of Johnson to the south.

"We're not close to having lines on maps," said Perry Webb, the president and chief executive officer for the chamber. "We're still in the research-data mode."

The plan, due about Oct. 31, will be designed to give every piece of property its highest and best use, according to Charles Hodges with Hodges & Associates. Hodges helped design a 700-acre development in Frisco, Texas, that Springdale would like to emulate.

"The development started in 1996 and now draws 23 million people per year," Hodges said. "There are 1,400 restaurant seats in walking distance of its ballpark."

Springdale has the same potential for such growth, Hodges said. The area under review is a spectacular property, Hodges said, the best he has worked on in 45 years.

"If you look at Northwest Arkansas from 10,000 feet, Springdale is the centerpiece of the table," Hodges said. "We need to take time and plan it right."

Brian Parker of Pizzuti Solutions also worked on the feasibility study for the ballpark and an arena.

"We want a plan to place Springdale in the right position for five, 10, 15 years and beyond," Parker said. "It could be a new destination for Springdale and Northwest Arkansas with new and unique retailers."

The area should be able to draw people Monday through Thursday, not just Friday, Saturday and Sunday, designers said. The plans are expected to include retail space, office buildings, sports and entertainment venues as well as greenspace, Hodges said.

"The plans need a backbone," Hodges said. "A skeleton of roads and a network of greenspace that's pedestrian-friendly."

Guests at five hotels in the Frisco development can walk to all the venues, Hodges said. Some malls, such as the Northwest Arkansas Mall, are fragmented where shoppers jump in a car to drive 100 yards to the next store, Hodges said.

A proposed interchange on I-540 near Oaklawn Avenue is a vital piece to the puzzle, Hodges said.

Also needed is data.

"We need you to fill in the blanks for us," Hodges said. "We haven't lived here for 20 years. We don't know the culture and the needs. We have to have the local perspective."

The cost of the plan and studies for research is about \$250,000 and will be paid by funds from the chamber's Springdale Tomorrow program, Webb said.

New taxes are not being considered to fund the development, Parker said, but tax incentives from the state are possible.