

## Development would double size of Eagle M3 proposal plus planned city park total 8,775 acres

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The city of Eagle could double in size and Southwest Idaho could get a regional park nearly eight times the size of Halls Gulch Reserve in the Boise Foothills if Eagle agrees to an Arizona development company's proposal.

The company wants to build a planned community in the Foothills north of Eagle, and Eagle is poised to purchase a large chunk of rangeland from the Bureau of Land Management.

M3 Companies plans to submit an application this month asking Eagle to annex about 6,800 acres it owns and committing to build an equestrian-based planned community. The site is north of Homer Road between Idaho 16 and Willow Creek Road. The company will host a neighborhood meeting about its project April 17.

Eagle, which has been interested in Foothills preservation and creating more parks, submitted an application last week to the Bureau of Land Management to purchase 1,915 acres of BLM land that borders M3's land. M3 partner Jeff Davis said his company would add 320 acres it owns to the publicly owned parcel to create a 2,235-acre open-space park with equestrian and hiking trails and an equestrian event center.

"Equestrians are a large part of our roots and our history," said Eagle Mayor Nancy Merrill. "Acquiring the BLM land will be a really great opportunity to protect some of those sensitive Foothills areas from development and keep the land and trails open to horseback riders" and other recreational users.

M3 has built two planned communities in Arizona, one equestrian-based, the other golf.

Davis said one of the reasons his company selected the Eagle area for its next planned community was that it was "horse country" and offered a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities.

Meridian's William Boehm is intrigued by M3's proposal. He lived in Rock Creek, a planned community near Superior, Colo., and the experience made him a planned-community devotee.

He said housing variety, density mix and careful attention to community features like open space and preservation give planned communities a unique character.

Boehm thinks the existing road system will be M3's Achilles' heel.

"The Eagle/Meridian/Boise roadway network is already overwhelmed," he said.

M3, Eagle and Ada County Highway District are well aware of the road issues in North Ada County. Only

one road, narrow and winding Willow Creek Road, traverses the 31,000-acre area between Idaho 16 and 55 and north of Homer Road. M3 said it will support a new road plan for the area.

### **M3's big plans**

Davis and his partners, Bill Brownlee and W. Scott Schirmer, have spent the past two years acquiring 6,800 acres of rangeland. M3 purchased nearly all of the land from longtime ranchers Brad Little and Sandy McLeod.

With the land purchase, M3 also acquired the grazing leases the ranchers held on 1,915 acres of BLM land adjacent to their property, the same land Eagle now wants to purchase for a regional park.

Davis would not provide details on how many homes or commercial buildings it wants to build in the planned community. He wants to wait and present the information first to the neighbors at the April 17 meeting.

A company brochure, though, said the land would be "master-planned as a mixed-use community for approximately 12,000 residential units, commercial and employment centers." M3 also said the project would include parks, schools, retail and cultural opportunities.

The largest planned community M3 has built so far is Prescott Lakes in central Arizona, which features 3,400 homes, an 18-hole golf course, seven parks and a town center on 1,200 acres.

Davis said designing and building a 6,800-acre planned community is not much more challenging than a 1,200-acre planned community.

He said the key is letting talented and experienced land planners and engineers do their stuff.

"We put together an A team (of land planners and engineers) to work with the planning staff at the city in order to create a plan that fits into Eagle's goals and the demands of the marketplace," said Davis.

In addition, Davis said M3 is financially capable of building the project because it is "well capitalized and owns all its property free and clear."

### **Eagle's big plans**

Eagle's park plans would use the Recreation and Public Purposes Act, which authorizes the sale or lease of public lands for recreational or public purposes to state and local governments, said Rosey Thomas, BLM Four Rivers field manager.

Merrill said the land would cost Eagle \$10 an acre, or about \$19,000. The city has set aside money for the purchase. Merrill said the BLM should make a decision on the sale by summer.

Regardless of what happens with M3, Eagle intends to move forward with the regional park, the mayor said.

## **Ada County surprised**

M3 and Eagle's projects came as a surprise to Ada County, which is drafting a plan to guide future growth in the 31,000 acres of rangeland in the Foothills north of Eagle. The county intends to have a draft complete this summer.

M3 owns nearly one-quarter of the planning area. Its neighbor to the east, Arizona-based SunCor, controls almost 5,500 acres, meaning the two developers control nearly 40 percent of the land the county is trying to plan.

Ada County Development Services Director Gerry Armstrong said he knew M3 had acquired several thousand acres to build a planned community.

Armstrong said Davis had attended a couple of county meetings on the plan, one with other large landowners and one with neighbors, but never mentioned that M3 planned to request annexation into Eagle.

The county is still moving ahead with drafting the plan. "Ada County has made a commitment to the residents to do this plan, and we'll move forward until we see evidence that (M3's land) is going to be annexed into Eagle," said Armstrong.

If the annexation happens, the county will pull back on the plan because, said Armstrong, "We don't want to do the city of Eagle's planning for them."

"What you'll see when our plan is laid out for the public is that our master plan will incorporate a lot of the same policies and goals laid out so far" in the county's plan, said Davis.

Merrill said Eagle prefers that large developments near the city request annexation.

"Development is going to occur, either on our outskirts (in Ada County) or in the city," Merrill said.

"We would prefer that they be inside our city limits so that we can use our design standards and our comprehensive plan to make sure the developments fits in with Eagle's plan."

Boise Mayor Dave Bieter has said in the past that he, too, thinks planned communities should be incorporated as a new city or annexed into a city so that taxpayers in nearby cities do not have to subsidize the development.

Davis said M3 wants to come into Eagle because, "We take the same position that mayors Bieter and Merrill have expressed — that large developments that sit adjacent to city boundaries should be included inside those boundaries."

### **Additional Information**

Learn more about M3's project at a neighborhood meeting from 6 to 8 p.m. on April 17 at Eagle Middle School, 1000 Floating Feather Road.

### **About M3's project**

According to M3, the 8,775-acre planned community will provide for:

- A variety of housing, jobs, recreational, open space and cultural opportunities.
- A 2,235-acre regional park that will be developed jointly with the city of Eagle with an equestrian and multipurpose event center and equestrian and hiking trails.
- Preservation of significant natural features and ridgelines.
- Community and neighborhood parks with sports fields and playgrounds.
- A centralized water and sewer system developed in conjunction with the city of Eagle and Eagle Sewer District.
- Adoption of a regional road system that will link Idaho 16 and 55 as well as provide for north/south routes to tie into existing roads.

### **About M3**

The M3 Cos. headquarters are located in Prescott, Ariz., with offices in Phoenix and Prescott.

The company, founded in 1983, has built two planned communities in Arizona and has built more than a dozen residential housing and commercial office and retail projects in Arizona.

M3's planned communities

- American Ranch: A 203-home equestrian community on 616 acres adjacent to 10,000 acres of public forest land. Features equestrian center, two arenas and 10 miles of community trails. The project received approval in 2002 with all lots sold out by 2005. The equestrian-based community won a national Gold Nugget award in 2005 for best community site plan.
  - Prescott Lakes: A golf community in Prescott, Ariz., on 1,200 acres with 3,400 homes, 18-hole golf course, seven petroglyph parks, one city park and community trails. The project started in 1998 and sold out in 2006.
  - Wickenburg Ranch: M3 received approval earlier this year to build a 2,234-unit development on 2,160 acres northwest of Phoenix.
  - Two other planned communities in preliminary design stages are the 2,100-acre Sandstone ranch in Castle Rock, Colo., and the 4,500-acre Cambel Ranch near Albuquerque, N.M.
- For more information on M3, visit [www.m3comp.com](http://www.m3comp.com).

### **By the numbers**

How much property tax revenue could M3's 6,800-acre planned community generate for Eagle?

The average Eagle home costs \$276,000 with annual taxes of about \$3,515.

If M3 builds 12,000 homes, they would generate \$42.2 million annually.

How large is a 6,800-acre planned community?

Harris Ranch and Hidden Springs are about 1,800 acres each.

How large is a 2,235-acre park?

- Ann Morrison: 153 acres
- Lucky Peak Reservoir: 2,820 acres
- Bruneau Dunes State Park: 4,800 acres

Eagle by the numbers

- 2006 population: 20,000
- 1996 population: 6,236
- City limits: 8,632 acres
- Land M3 wants to annex for a planned community: 6,800 acres
- Land Eagle wants to buy from BLM and annex for a city park: 1,915 acres

### **Major development is coming to North Ada Foothills**

Approved North Ada Foothills planned communities:

- Hidden Springs: Planned community of 1,035 homes on 1,844 acres. Construction began in 1998. To date, 778 homes have been built or approved.

- Avimor: SunCor is building a planned community of 683 homes on 830 acres. Construction begins this summer.

Proposed North Ada Foothills planned communities or other large developments:

- M3 Cos.: Proposed planned community of up to 12,000 homes on 6,800 acres that would be annexed into Eagle.
- Dry Creek Creek Ranch: Proposed planned community of up to 3,800 homes on 1,414 acres.
- Cartwright Ranch: Proposed planned community of up to 700 homes on 1,000-acres as an expansion of Hidden Springs.
- Bragail: Owner Cullen Connolly is proposing a subdivision of 127 homes on 636 acres.
- Kastera Homes: Two proposed subdivisions totaling 159 homes on 938 acres.