
LAS VEGAS SUN

Plan: Remove toxins, build homes

Permits fully in place, cleanup to begin soon for 15,000-home community in Henderson



Steve Marcus

For 18 years this land near Lake Mead Parkway and Boulder Highway, the site of a former magnesium plant and toxic waste dumping, has been the subject of more than 500,000 tests for contamination. After \$60 million in private spending, the site is expected to be ready this week for cleanup to begin so a 2,200-acre community can be built.

By *Mike Trask*

Tue, May 13, 2008 (2 a.m.)

If all goes according to plan, a few years from now the first of an estimated 30,000 people will start moving into a new Henderson community just off Lake Mead Parkway in the vacant desert that lines the road headed toward Lake Las Vegas.

The new neighbors will have the comfort of knowing that the dirt beneath their homes and their yards has been studied — and studied again — to ensure it's just as safe as the rest of the land in Southern Nevada.

They also will know their neighborhood once was a wastewater dump and that ensuring its safety took more than 500,000 tests, 18 years and \$60 million to rule out the possibility that the goldfish that eventually will live there won't grow a third eye.

In addition to 15,000 homes, the 2,200-acre community planned for the north side of Lake Mead Parkway — just a mile from Boulder Highway — would include three shopping areas and more than a dozen parks.

For now the only symbol of this future community is a tiny information center that promotes everything to come and celebrates what once was at the location.

The center features photos of those who worked at the Basic Magnesium Plant during the height of World War II, noting the “heroic labor” performed at the country's largest magnesium plant, whose production was used to build planes and bombs.

After the war the state purchased the plant and in 1952 created Basic Management Inc. to manage utilities in the industrial complex.

A year later the city of Henderson was incorporated.

Over the next quarter-century chemical and metal manufacturers used the facilities, dumping waste in unlined retention ponds throughout the area. Laws adopted in 1976 required the ponds to be lined. More waste was dumped.

For 50 years the area was used to store hazardous commercial and residential waste. Most of the time, it went directly into the earth.

The area has been studied for the past 18 years through more than 500,000 water tests for more than 500 compounds. What was there is still there, and will be until it is moved away.

In the meantime, Basic has taken steps to keep the contaminants out of the ground water and to clean some shallow ground water affected, said Dante Pistone, a spokesman for the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection.

On Wednesday there will be a celebration at the site to mark the fact that all needed permits are in place to begin cleaning up the area — and to start the process of transforming another part of the old Henderson of plants into the new Henderson of upscale communities and, Nevada being Nevada, casinos.

The nearly 20-year process is not an unusual time frame for an environmentally delicate project, said Mark Paris, the chief executive of Landwell Co., which is developing the area.

But in Las Vegas, 20 years is a lifetime — or several lifetimes. Construction on Summerlin was just beginning when plans for developing the waste-filled area started.

It has cost more than \$60 million — all in private funding — for the hundreds of thousands of soil and ground-water tests.

The lengthy investigation of the site's entire 2,200 acres shows about 400 acres contain contaminants —

including metals, radionuclides, pesticides, salts and asbestos — that may pose a health risk.

Now begins the cleanup process, one of trucking out the dirty dirt.

Through the project, Landwell, which specializes in restoring environmentally affected sites — notably the Valley Auto Mall — will be turning its attention to Henderson's future urban core.

The 2,200 acres could be considered a mammoth infill lot, one the city hopes will become part of the redevelopment of downtown, an area that has not kept pace with Henderson's suburban sprawl.

Landwell and the surrounding development, including the Lake Mead Crossing shopping center at Lake Mead Parkway and Boulder Highway and the mixed-used development planned for an area near Water Street, represent potential for building a strong urban core over the next decade.

There are plans for trails running from the new neighborhood to the old section of Henderson. That's in addition to the 500 acres of parks and the hotel and casino that would go at the center of the development, to be named Cadence.

"This is not Lake Las Vegas," Paris said. "The community will not have gated neighborhoods. It will have a broad cross-section of homes. But there will be plenty of opportunity for middle-class America to live."

The development will be similar in size to Inspirada or Sun City Anthem. At its peak — in a decade or so if all goes smoothly — more than 30,000 people will live in Cadence, in single-family homes, condominiums and apartments. The market being what it is, no prices have been announced.

But before the moving trucks start firing up, a lot of dirt must be moved. Basic Management will be trucking out all the contaminated soil to a new landfill about three miles away near Auto Show Drive and Eastgate Road.

Emergency plans are in place to deal with any accidents, Paris said. Dirt will be removed from truck tires each time a load is picked up or dropped off, and there is equipment to vacuum any spilled soil off roadways. Most of the loads will be transported between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. to avoid rush hours.

The cleanup will take at least 18 months, after which the land will be tested again.

"We have volunteered to go back and test every lot before construction begins," Paris said. "It should provide assurance to every homeowner that where they are going to live and bring their family is safe."

If there are no glitches, the first residents could arrive in early 2010.

Naturally, the market has to cooperate. Relying on his research, Paris expects the market to turn around by the end of 2009.

So there's no sales office quite yet. But there is that roofless open-air information center, offering a look at the past and the future.

At present, it's still just another section of desert.

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V Homes For Sale

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Discussion: 9 comments so far...

By [elvisno33](#)

5/13/08 at 8:46 a.m.

(Removed by the site staff)

By [Juice](#)

5/13/08 at 9:54 a.m.

[Suggest removal](#)

Why cart this contaminated & polluted soil only a few blocks away? The soil will still be in the Valley. The soil should be transported and cleaned someplace where it will not have to be addressed again in 20 years.

After grading it and transporting it just a few blocks away, now it will become airborne for all of us to breathe.

Why don't we ever learn?

By [rtw66](#)

5/13/08 at 11:19 a.m.

[Suggest removal](#)

And we need more homes why?

By [jfnance32](#)

5/13/08 at 11:26 a.m.

[Suggest removal](#)

I puzzled by the need to build 15,000 homes, too.

By [johninmontana](#)

5/13/08 at 4:33 p.m.

[Suggest removal](#)

I simply cannot imagine building more homes in Las Vegas and the surrounding areas. Currently, there are thousands of home for sale, many of them vacant. Soon the entire state will be paved over with cookie cutter houses and big box stores. The horrible traffic situation will continue to get worse, if that is possible. Has anyone flown over Lake Mead lately? Where oh where will the water come from? Maybe new showers will dispense sand rather than water.

By [Rverp1](#)

5/14/08 at 1:02 p.m.

[Suggest removal](#)

We gain 4000 people every month in the valley...They need to live somewhere...By the time this is ready there will be a major demand...

By [machoneplus](#)

5/19/08 at 8:31 a.m.

[Suggest removal](#)

Who assures home owners that it is safe to live in this proposed community? If there is a class action law suit, it will probably name the City of Henderson, How will the City of Henderson protect its self? Put another way, who pays if the clean up doesn't work, people get sick and the site passed environmental laws? Why take a chance and

have a residential use, why not continue with an industrial/commercial use?



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