



MEMORANDUM

Date: September 29, 2016

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **Development Concepts Regarding Regional Visitors Center Repurposing of the Historic Pima County Courthouse**

Please see the attached preliminary concepts associated with repurposing the Historic Pima County Courthouse as a regional visitors center. The documents demonstrate the full range of opportunities being considered for the repurposing of this County structure as a regional community asset.

CHH/anc

Attachment

c: James Cook, Executive Director, Western National Parks Association
Brent DeRaad, President and CEO, VisitTucson
Joaquin Ruiz, Executive Dean, The University of Arizona
Tom Burke, Deputy County Administrator for Administration
Lisa Josker, Director, Facilities Management
Linda Mayro, Director, Sustainability and Conservation

A Gateway to Southern Arizona

Regional Visitor Center



Challenge

Visitors from across the globe come to experience Southern Arizona's unique cultural, historical, and natural resources—bringing dollars and vitality to the local economy.

But how do we promote exploration of Southern Arizona—and drive the downstream economic benefits—while preserving the rich biodiversity of our region and protecting public lands?

Opportunity

Develop a regional visitor center for Southern Arizona in the heart of downtown Tucson.

- A gateway for our region's unique resources
- A partnership between local governments, federal agencies, educational institutions, and nonprofit entities
- A self-sustaining facility that offers comprehensive information, education, and programming
- A welcoming destination for visitors and locals alike
- A driver for the local economy



A Gateway to Southern Arizona

Creating a Gateway to Southern Arizona

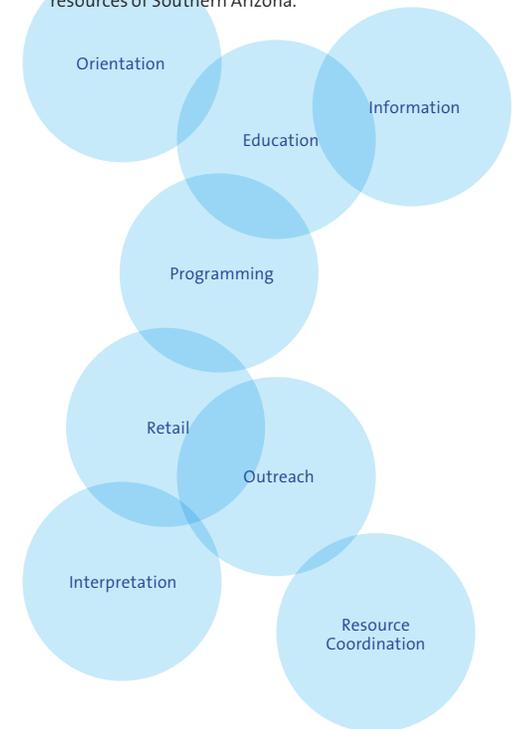
The center will be a gateway to the region's cultural, historical, natural, and recreational resources, amplifying their importance through innovative partnerships and programs.

It will advance our community's commitment to sustainable, positive change while nurturing the local economy.

- Strategic location in downtown Tucson's historic Pima County Courthouse
- Destination supports optimal visibility, accessibility, convenience, and proximity to parking and transportation
- One-stop facility representing multiple stakeholders
- Architecturally significant structure—already a symbol of Tucson's unique character—that reflects the texture of the region
- Destination center that would help invigorate an area of downtown dedicated primarily to government and civic functions
- Contemporary interpretative gallery that inspires longer visitation in the region and creates relevancy for current and future generations
- Local education and community interface through innovative partnerships and robust programming with a focus on urban, youth, diverse, and underserved audiences
- Educational opportunities for the natural and cultural environment
- Community meeting facilities for forums addressing public land and community needs
- Potential to help extended natural pedestrian traffic beyond the revitalized Congress Street corridor
- Potential to get visitors to stay in the region longer, adding dollars to the local economy

Unique combination of offerings serves locals and visitors alike.

The new center will have a broad but focused program model, featuring the cultural, historical, natural, and recreational resources of Southern Arizona.



How Does Southern Arizona Benefit?

The center will create many benefits for the greater Tucson community. It's a nexus of converging interests and opportunities, adding value to the City of Tucson, Pima County, and the Southern Arizona region.

Most importantly, the center will help meet the needs of future visitors, adding value to their experience in Southern Arizona:

33%

of Millennials surveyed are interested in visiting Tucson in the next two years.

29%

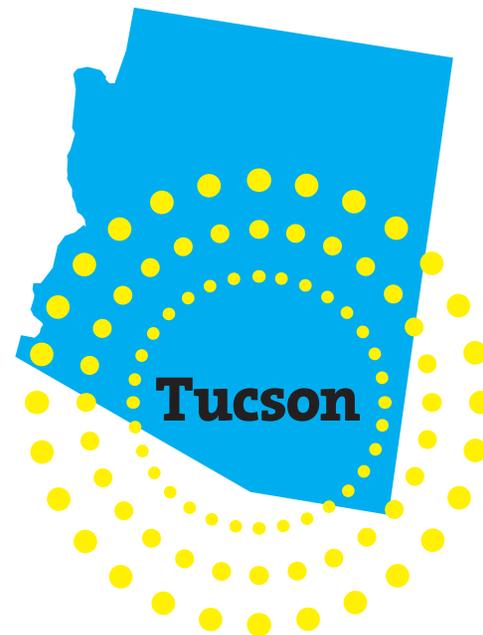
of GenXers say the same.

- The center will promote extended visitation (hotels, restaurants, etc)
- It will drive spending at local businesses and helps grow tax base
- And federal agencies and nonprofit organizations are willing and able to commit long-term funding through extended leases and annual operating budgets to help fund and operate facilities

In November of 2013, the Urban Land Institute generated specific recommendation for revitalizing downtown Tucson, including build a regional visitors center. Our proposal is directly aligned.

The center creates the environment for economic development consistent with Urban Land Institute recommendations:

- An interpretive center
- A center to incentivize exploring Tucson
- A flex space for seasonal display changes
- Easy access to Interstate 10 and the river front
- Encourage street car and bicycle use with ample parking



What's the Economic Potential?

Travel and tourism is a \$2.6 billion industry in Southern Arizona.

The new center will encourage visitors to stay longer and contribute even more to the region's economy.

- Travel and tourism represents the largest industry in the region, and tourism-impact research reveals that 67% of local tourists visit or recommend Tucson to others because of our natural environment
- The center is a targeted way to encourage visitors to stay longer, translating into extra spending and increased tax revenue
- The center can be a driving force for other new mixed-use development in the surrounding area, including the services to support increased visitation to downtown's various cultural resources
- Based on comparative models in other cities, spending and tax revenue increases that the center generates make for a wise investment

Longer stays mean more spending.

If 2% of travel parties stay in Southern Arizona longer, the region earns additional revenue through spending.



Longer stays mean more tax revenue.

If 2% of travel parties stay in Southern Arizona longer, the region earns additional revenue through taxes.



Who's Involved?

A diverse group of organizations and individuals have come together to create this proposal, addressing funding, development, design, operations, and impact of a regional visitor center.

The work group brings expertise and enthusiasm to assist in broader development efforts.

A smart collaboration for success.

The success of the new center depends on broad-based involvement and support. The project involves Western National Parks Association, Visit Tucson, University of Arizona, Pima County, City of Tucson, Arizona Historical Society, the January 8th Memorial, United States Fish & Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and others.

Sound like a familiar plan?

The same group of partners put together a similar package as part of the 2015 Pima County Bond effort. Unfortunately, the bond measure didn't pass, but the common need—and shared enthusiasm—for a central visitor center still exists.



Southern Arizona. Downtown Tucson. The Site.



Downtown Tucson
Downtown Tucson is having an exciting renaissance. Increasingly, it's a culture and entertainment destination for locals and visitors alike.

Southern Arizona
Southern Arizona is one of the most beautiful natural settings in the country. Vast Sonoran Desert spaces and the rugged Sky Island landscape define our region. Our lives are enhanced by the ability to access these beautiful places for recreation, exercise, and reflection.

Visible Location
The center will be located in the historic Pima County Courthouse, already an iconic architectural destination for Tucson visitors.

Who Will Use the Center?

The center will be full of information, interpretation, and programming that shows off what makes Southern Arizona unique. Different content will appeal to different visitor types.



Tourists/Visitors

This group is coming to visit Tucson as a destination. The site will equip these visitors with the tools to design unique regional experiences based on duration and distance.



Residents

Local residents are likely coming into the area for dining, entertainment, and special events. Locals may use the center as a gathering space to begin walks, tours, and other outings.



Families

This group is likely coming to the district for dining and entertainment opportunities, and special events. The center will direct families to new experiences on site and around the region.



Students

Whether elementary-, secondary-, or college-level, this group will use the center as an educational resource—an extended classroom to learn about what makes Southern Arizona special as space and place.



Convention-goers

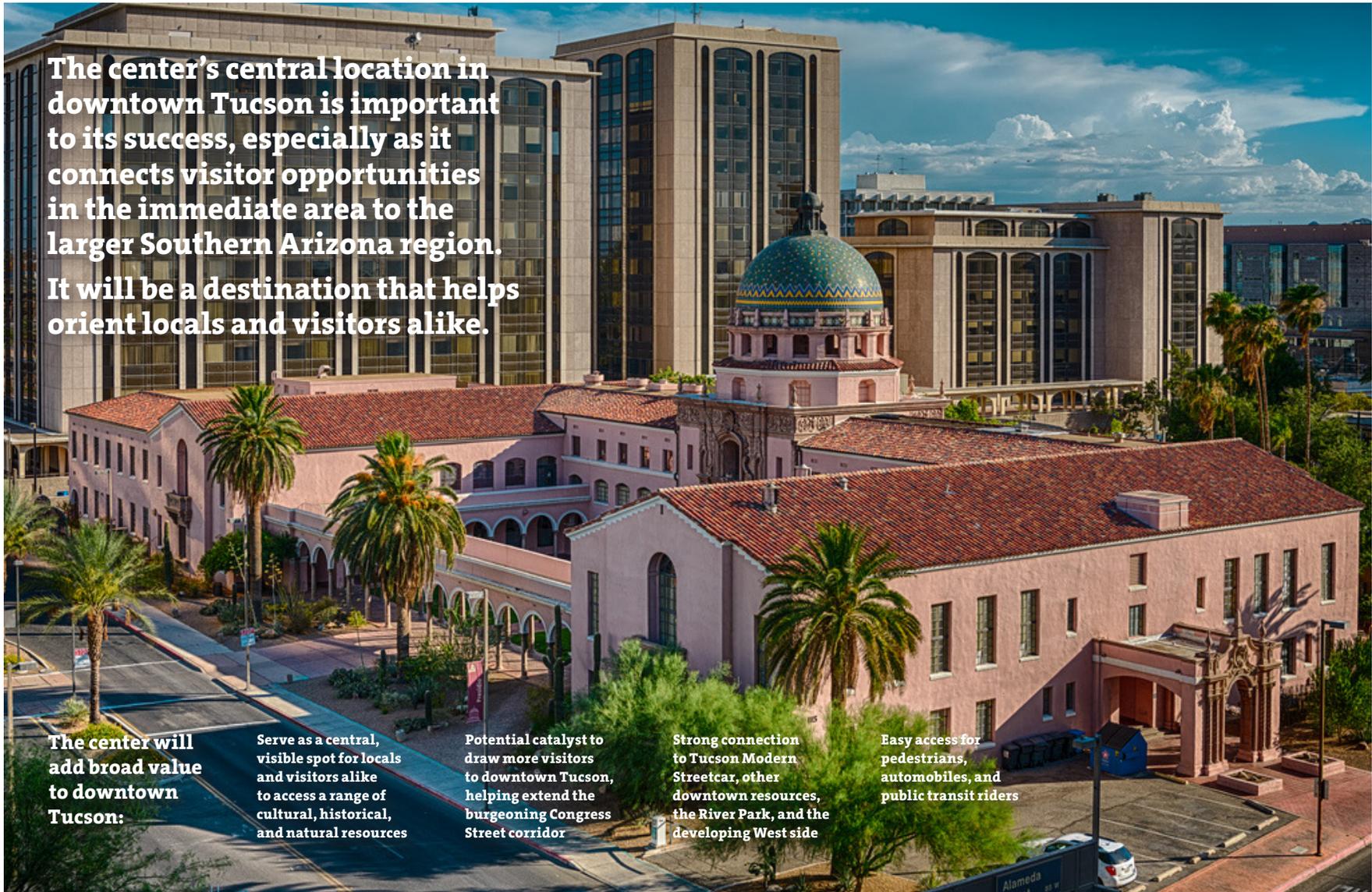
This group will be staying in or near downtown for specific events. The space will offer information on-site to help amplify and hopefully extend their stay...or convince them to come back.



Community Groups

These groups will engage with center visitors to extend their own messages. They will create a nexus of activity centered around the site, helping keep programming both engaging and current.

Why the Historic Courthouse?



The center's central location in downtown Tucson is important to its success, especially as it connects visitor opportunities in the immediate area to the larger Southern Arizona region. It will be a destination that helps orient locals and visitors alike.

The center will add broad value to downtown Tucson:

Serve as a central, visible spot for locals and visitors alike to access a range of cultural, historical, and natural resources

Potential catalyst to draw more visitors to downtown Tucson, helping extend the burgeoning Congress Street corridor

Strong connection to Tucson Modern Streetcar, other downtown resources, the River Park, and the developing West side

Easy access for pedestrians, automobiles, and public transit riders

The Site: Level One

The entire ground floor, courtyard, and adjacent park are for visitors.

The courthouse ground floor is dedicated as public space for visitors, split between the new regional visitor center and University of Arizona Mineral Museum. The center and the museum will be run by

Western National Parks Association as a complete visitor experience. It will hold orientation resources for Visit Tucson, multiple public land entities, and other partners. The visitor center will also activate the

main courtyard, an auditorium, and the John Dillinger Courtroom as programming venues. Adjacent to Presidio Park, the center will both draw from and help push visitors to the planned January 8th Memorial.



What's Inside: Five Major Themes

The center is designed to introduce residents and tourists alike to the mysteries, stories, and history of Southern Arizona. A range of themes that highlight the issues and unique character of the region will guide the development of informational and interpretive content.



What's Inside: Possible Stories

Each theme can be unpacked in multiple ways—weaving together several stories of place and space—to create rich content for exhibit features. The initial proposal identifies a range of possibilities.



The Santa Cruz River



Tumamoc Hill



Baboquivari Peak



Kitt Peak



Dark Skies



Saguaro Cactus



Sonoran Desert Biodiversity



Spanish & Mexican Frontiers



Anza Trail



Silver



Sosa-Carrillo-Frémont House



Biking in Tucson & Desert Trails



UNESCO World City of Gastronomy



Three Sisters (Corn, Beans, Squash)



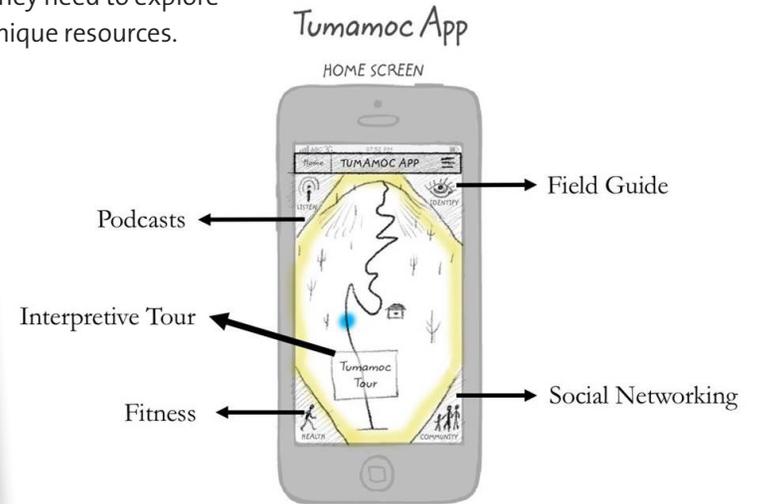
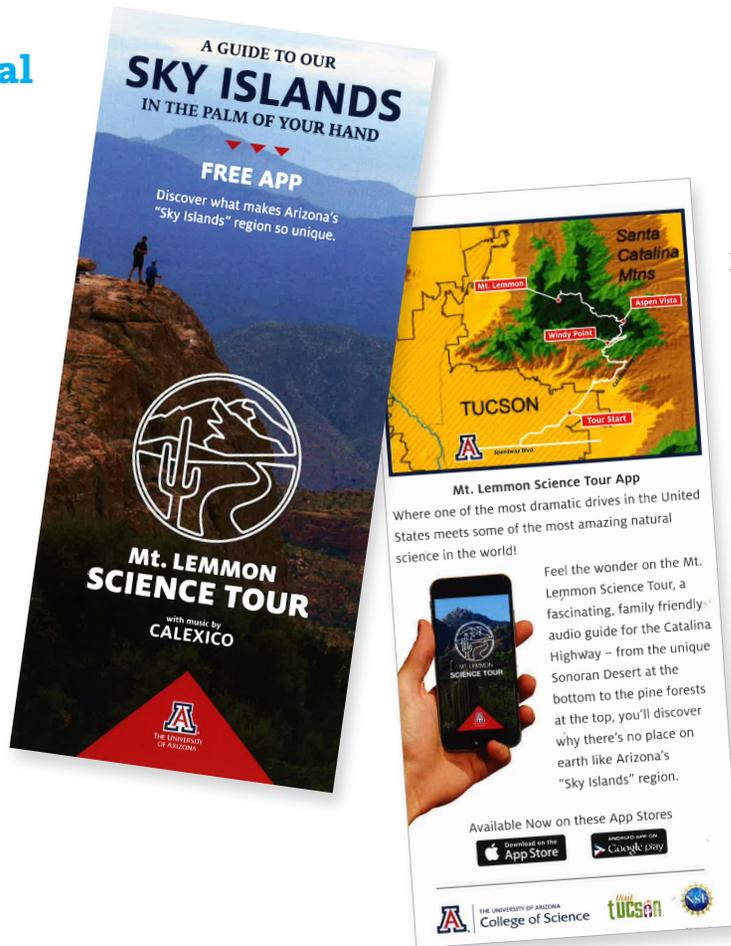
Sustainable Desert Living

What's Inside: High-touch + High-tech

Rich content will come to live throughout the center in multiple ways. But as we consider Millennial and GenX visitors, mobile is an important touchpoint.

The University of Arizona is a key partner and potential content creator for the new center.

Apps are already being developed or prototyped to give visitors the mobile tools they need to explore the region's unique resources.



How Will it Work?

Operators



Activities

Marketing & Promotion

Staffing

Interpretation

Programming & Tours

Concierge Services

Personal Services

Logistics & Promotion

Volunteers & Training

Retail & Food

Business Model

Western National Parks Association, a nonprofit education partner of the National Park Service, operates national park stores across the West. WNPA employs an interpretive retail model, melding educational storytelling with educational product sales.



The same approach would come to life in the new visitor center; retail sales would be the primary revenue driver for the facility. The partners would also pursue grant opportunities and solicit philanthropic support to supplement retail revenue.

Other Models for Success

1995 Concept for a Southern Arizona Visitor Center

The main objective of this concept was to inform—to create a place where tourists as well as natives could learn about Southern Arizona through interpretive display and human interactions. It focused on regional recreation, community, heritage, the city center, and the ecology of the Sonoran Desert.

Liberty Bell Center

The Liberty Bell's new home employs larger-than-life historic documents and graphic images to explore the facts and the myths surrounding the Bell. The center also serves as an orientation point for many of Philadelphia's other cultural and historical resources. Visitors coming to see the Bell have access to information and tickets to facilities well beyond the center itself.



Red Rock Canyon Visitor Center

Introducing more than one million visitors a year to the wonders of Red Rock Canyon, the new Interpretive Facility is designed to introduce visitors to the relevant science, art and culture that will enhance their experience in Red Rock Canyon, and then encourage them to visit the real thing nearby.



**In Richmond, VA,
regional visitor
centers created an
economic impact of
\$853,500**

Discover Richmond

In 2010, 47,500 visitors were served by three Richmond-area visitor centers (a small number in comparison to what the proposed Southern Arizona Visitors Center can reach). One-third of visitors responding to a survey the same year said they would make additional purchases when visiting the area because of visitor center interaction. The additional spending amounted to about \$38 per travel party, for a total economic impact of \$853,500.

How Can You Help?

The new regional visitor center will come to life with the partnership and support of many businesses, organizations, governments, and individuals. The project needs commitments in several critical areas.

