

**PUEBLOPLEX**

# Master plan for chemical depot nears completion

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THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

A master plan for the future use of the Pueblo Chemical Depot should be ready by the end of February.

One more community meeting on the master plan being developed by Matrix Design Group will be held Jan. 13, but there still are some moving pieces, Celeste Werner, vice president and director of planning for Matrix, told the PuebloPlex board last week.

PuebloPlex is the state-designated board charged with redevelopment of the 73-year-old depot that is being closed by the Army. About 16,000 acres have been deemed excess property, while the remaining 7,000 acres are being used for chemical weapons destruction.

The biggest question mark at this point involves the ongoing environmental remediation work at the depot. PuebloPlex wants to fast-track federal turnover of the central portion of the depot, where there are relatively few environmental cleanup sites. There also are requirements to provide access to projects for the homeless that could

linger on after the plan is prepared.

When that happens, PuebloPlex needs to seek appropriate county zoning for the depot to assure that the activities of companies wishing to locate at the depot can be approved by the PuebloPlex board without full-blown county hearings that could add time to projects.

"This would not be a traditional zoning district, although it is actually similar to a planned unit development," Werner said. "It provides as much flexibility as possible to PuebloPlex."

That got some push-back from Pueblo County Commissioner Terry Hart, who said the public's interests still must be protected.

Noting that even getting the zoning approved will take six to eight months, Werner assured Hart that Matrix has developed regulations that are flexible and protect public interests at the same time for other communities.

The issue with PuebloPlex is that the eventual plan would incorporate things as varied as industrial processes, live-in training and even retail sales at the sprawling

site. With traditional zoning, multiple permits would be required, lengthening the approval process.

"All we're really looking for is flexibility," said Russell DeSalvo, president and CEO of PuebloPlex. "If we can give them certainty without risk, it's important since the political faces change."

Meanwhile, redevelopment continues to forge ahead under the existing master contract that allows PuebloPlex to work with the Army in leasing property.

In the last month, 17 more concrete igloos were leased under an advertising campaign to better market them for storage. Three projects dealing with railroad refurbishing are in negotiations, DeSalvo said.

The board also heard a presentation on the possible introduction of black-footed ferrets at the depot by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The ferrets, which prey on prairie dogs, have been considered before at the depot and were reintroduced on Walker Ranches, located west of the depot, in 2013.

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