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How to develop Kennecott land?

93,000 acres: The company is looking at planning a development that could house 500,000 residents

By Jacob Santini
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SOUTH JORDAN - At the time, Daybreak - the 4,200-acre development in western South Jordan - seemed to be an enormous undertaking.

But that's nothing compared with the rest of Kennecott Land's holdings and the scope of its new development plans.

The company owns 144 square miles - that's 93,000 acres - from Great Salt Lake wetlands in the north to Utah County's western mountains. It's an area that encompasses Salt Lake County's entire west bench, from the valley floor to the crest of the Oquirrh Mountains.

Kennecott is launching a process that could, by year's end, result in a Salt Lake County-approved master plan for the land. The company - it does not want to develop that plan by itself - is holding a series of summits for officials from the county, neighboring west-side cities and other agencies, including school and sewer districts.

"The best communities do come from a collaborative process," said Vicki Varela, Kennecott Land's vice president for public policy.

County officials like Kennecott Land's approach.

"It's unusual that a developer would approach the county this early," said Jeff Daugherty, director of planning and development services.

Owning a majority of the Salt Lake Valley's remaining developable land means the stakes are high.

"We haven't had a 93,000-acre blank slate since the pioneers rolled into this valley," Daugherty said. "If we get it right, it's going to be an amazing project. If we get it wrong - we don't want to get it wrong."

Kennecott officials feel the same way, and that is one of the factors that led them to launch the planning process with policymakers.

"This really will shape how the whole region will grow," Varela predicted.

With a development that could ultimately house as many as 500,000 people and create jobs for 100,000, the land will have major impacts on transportation, transit, public works and open space.

Details of how development could look are still under wraps. Kennecott's future role in mining along that east-facing slope of the mountains - and what will be done with its giant open-pit copper mine -remains unclear.

Varela said the development will carry over many of the characteristics of Daybreak. That development, which began selling in 2004, ultimately is expected to include 14,000 homes and 9 million square feet of commercial and office space.

Daybreak is punctuated with open space - a lake is being built, for example - as well as walkability, conservation efforts and an eventual TRAX light-rail extension.

Kennecott Land spokeswoman Jana Kettering said the company plans to keep 30 percent of the remaining 93,000 acres of the new-development area as open space.

Plans also include opening the Oquirrh Mountains to recreation.

"This will be the first time the public will have access," Kettering said. The mountains are "basically private land now."

One thing's for sure: The project will take time. Developing all that land could take up to 75 years, depending on population trends. But if Salt Lake County's current population boom is sustained, construction could move forward much more quickly.

"We could be built out in the next 30 years," Daugherty said.

jsantini@sltrib.com

What's next

When a master plan is agreed upon, perhaps later this year, Salt Lake County will hold a series of public meetings before voting on whether to adopt the proposal.

Kennecott land - by the numbers

144: The number of square miles - a land mass bigger than Salt Lake City.

93,000: Total number of acres.

53: Percentage of Salt Lake County's remaining developable land that is owned by the company.

26: Linear miles of the property, from north to south.

500,000: Possible population when the property is completely built out,