

## Tucson Citizen

# Rio Nuevo's 'gateway' under way

\$4.6 million, tree-lined boulevard to funnel visitors to Cultural Plaza

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A grand avenue is emerging from the recent home of a garbage dump as Rio Nuevo's signature attraction slowly starts to take shape just west of the Santa Cruz River.

Granite Construction started work about 45 days ago on the Avenida del Convento, a 1,000-foot-long, tree-lined avenue that will feed visitors from Congress Street into the Rio Nuevo Cultural Plaza.

The street should be ready for drivers by Feb. 28, though people will have to wait through the rest of the decade for the rebuilt Mission San Agustin and Convento as well as the relocated Arizona State Museum, Arizona Historical Society and Arizona Science Center.

"This is construction now," Rio Nuevo director Greg Shelko said. "This is no more master planning, no more noodling about. This is huge for us."

The Rio Nuevo Multipurpose Facilities District Board of Directors on Wednesday approved a guaranteed maximum price of \$4.6 million to build Avenida del Convento and a slightly shorter Clearwater Street extension that is expected to ultimately link the West Side with the Tucson Convention Center.

"This is the gateway to the mission and convento," Shelko said. "Avenida del Convento is more in the line of a grand boulevard than just a street."

The avenida skirts the east edge of the Mercado District at Menlo Park, a 105-home and commercial project in the early stages of construction. Shady trees and wide brick sidewalks will front Mercado's commercial district.

"It's a 108-foot right of way and only 24 feet of it is for cars," said Gale Marsland, project manager for Rio Development, which is developing the Mercado District.

The Rio Nuevo board also recommended hiring the downtown architectural firm Burns Wald-Hopkins to head up the design team for Tucson Heritage Origins Park, which includes the mission, convento and mission gardens. The City Council is expected to give final approval for the \$965,000 design team contract on June 27.

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