

How a proactive partnership secured nearly $28,000 in grant funding and created lasting savings at Bella Via

Balancing beauty and budgets

Bella Via is home to 1,656 single-family residences in Mesa, Arizona, located just behind Eastmark near Signal Butte and Warner roads. The Tuscany-inspired community features a fountain area, themed playgrounds, an amphitheater that hosts resident events throughout the year and a recently renovated dog park. With nearly 30 acres of irrigated turf, maintaining the community's landscape has always been important to residents, but it also makes irrigation one of the association's largest operating expenses.

As water costs continued to rise across Arizona, Bella Via's board of directors partnered with FirstService Residential to identify ways to control expenses without sacrificing the community's appearance or resident experience. Together, they set out to find a long-term solution that would protect homeowners while preserving the character of the community residents know and love.

The water bill wake-up call

Like many communities throughout the Valley, Bella Via experienced rising utility costs year after year. Although the association remained financially healthy, the sheer amount of irrigated turf meant monthly water bills regularly reached staggering amounts.

"Costs were going up significantly month after month. A $60,000, $70,000, or even $80,000 water bill in a single month just wasn't cutting it for us. We had to take steps to reduce the continued rising cost of irrigation," said Sara Morones, dedicated community manager of Bella Via with FirstService Residential.

Board president Steven McCollum saw firsthand how dramatically water costs were affecting the association's finances.

"One year we had about a $70,000 overage because of a mid-year increase in water pricing. Water was the primary driver behind rising expenses, and we knew we needed to find a better long-term solution."



Rather than waiting for future restrictions, penalties, or even larger rate increases, the board chose a proactive approach with support from Sara and the FirstService Residential team.

Turning opportunity into action

Through research and industry outreach, FirstService Residential identified the City of Mesa's Water Conservation Grant Program as an opportunity for Bella Via. Sara worked with the community's landscape contractor to evaluate sites and present recommendations to the board.

The first approved project converted 8,824 square feet of turf along Veneto Street into a lower-water-use landscape featuring granite and drought-tolerant plantings. After completion, Bella Via received approximately $11,896 in grant reimbursement from the City of Mesa.

For Treasurer Jeff Wentzel, the value came not only from the savings generated, but from having a management partner that could help the board navigate this undertaking.

"As water bills continued to rise, I spent a lot of time focused on the budget, so it was reassuring to know that whenever I had a financial question or needed additional information, the FirstService team was there to help and provide whatever the board needed to make informed decisions."

The success of the initial project led to additional conservation efforts throughout the community.

More recently, Bella Via secured approval for a second grant application covering an additional 8,104-square-foot conversion area at Dante and Warner. Combined, the two grants generated $27,724 in approved funding for the community's water conservation initiatives.

Using data to make smarter decisions

Grant funding was only part of the strategy.

To better understand irrigation performance and identify opportunities for additional savings,



Bella Via enrolled in Waterfluence, a City of Mesa monitoring platform that tracks irrigation usage and performance. The community also participated in a city-sponsored irrigation audit that provided additional insight into water usage and system performance.

“Waterfluence gave us a reference point on which areas to select for the board to review,” said Sara. “It helped us determine where we could make the biggest impact, so the process became very strategic.”

The irrigation assessment identified ways to improve efficiency, including controller upgrades, irrigation scheduling changes, nozzle replacements and other water-saving measures that continue to inform the community’s long-term planning.



Conserving water without sacrificing curb appeal

The board approached the project with a simple philosophy: save water and money without sacrificing the features that make Bella Via a beautiful place to live.

That meant identifying areas where conservation efforts could have the greatest impact while preserving the beauty residents value. In some locations, grass was replaced with drought-tolerant landscaping. In others, including Bella Via’s main monument entrances, artificial turf was used to reduce water use while maintaining the community’s appearance.

To date, the community has converted approximately 44,004 square feet of turf, just over one acre, to lower-water-use landscaping. The initial work is already creating significant savings without dramatically changing the look of the neighborhood.

For board director Cece Brueckman, that balance was essential.

“We’re proud of our community and how it looks. As a board, our goal was to make decisions that would save money while still keeping Bella Via beautiful for us all. I’m proud of what we’ve accomplished.”

Building support through communication

The board understood that successful change requires resident buy-in.

“The first comments we heard were, ‘We love our pretty grass, we don’t want to see it go,’” explained Sara. “People didn’t understand at first, so educating residents became crucial.”

Throughout the project, the board and FirstService Residential kept residents informed through newsletters, community emails, social media updates, budget communications and homeowner meetings. Residents received updates on project timelines, water savings, grant opportunities and the financial benefits of conservation. Homeowners were also invited to provide feedback on future conversion areas.

Cece believes that collaborative approach made all the difference.

“What I’ve appreciated most is seeing the

community come together around this project. Residents understand why we're doing it, how it benefits the community and what we're trying to accomplish. Because of that, we've seen a lot of support throughout the process."

Savings that add up

Bella Via's conservation efforts are already delivering results. The initial conversion of just over one acre is already delivering an estimated $3,000 to $4,000 in monthly water savings. With approximately 29 acres of landscaped common area remaining, even incremental future conversions could result in substantial long-term savings.

The community has also secured $27,724 in grant funding that can be reinvested into Bella Via rather than funded entirely through homeowner assessments.

For Treasurer Jeff Wentzel, those results are a direct reflection of strong partnership.

"I'm grateful for the valuable planning and partnership with FirstService Residential. They have made all the difference in this project's success."



Steven points to another key factor behind Bella Via's success: the board's decision to invest in dedicated on-site management through FirstService Residential.

"It was an expense to go with a dedicated manager, and we initially took some heat for that decision. But Sara has paid for herself these last two and a half years with what she's been able to do for the community and save us financially."

From identifying grant opportunities and coordinating applications to analyzing water usage data, managing vendor relationships, and supporting resident communication, FirstService Residential helped Bella Via uncover opportunities that may otherwise have gone unrealized. Working alongside the board, the team helped turn a growing operating expense into meaningful savings and long-term financial benefits.

Staying ahead of the curve

The current landscape conversion is only the beginning of Bella Via's long-term water conservation strategy. As the association continues to assess its approximately 30 acres of landscaped common areas, the board and management team will identify places where turf can be reduced or replaced while preserving the community's appearance and functionality. The process includes:

Identifying suitable areas: Reviewing turf based on its use, visibility, irrigation needs and role in the overall landscape design.

Evaluating potential savings: Using results from the initial project and data from Waterfluence to estimate water and maintenance savings.

Planning project costs: Applying the association's experience with the initial conversions to develop more accurate estimates for future phases.

Phasing the work: Prioritizing future projects

based on available funding, projected water savings, grant opportunities and other community needs.

The board has not yet established a final number of acres or implementation timeline. However, the initial project offers a valuable benchmark for future planning and supports an ongoing, thoughtful approach to making Bella Via more water efficient while protecting the character of the community.

The board is also exploring programs related to shade trees, irrigation efficiency and sustainability as part of that broader strategy.

Steven's advice to other HOA boards facing similar challenges is simple:

"Bite the bullet early. Invest in water-saving measures and dedicated management, because delaying just means bigger assessments and more financial strain down the road."

Looking back on the project's success, Cece credits both the board's commitment and FirstService Residential's partnership for helping make the initiative possible.

"We wouldn't be here without Sara and FirstService Residential. Their support made all the difference."

Bella Via's water conservation journey demonstrates what can happen when an engaged board, experienced management partner and supportive residents work together toward a common goal. By acting early, using data to guide decisions and pursuing available resources, the community turned a growing expense into nearly $28,000 in grant funding, an estimated $3,000 to $4,000 in monthly water savings and a proven blueprint for continued water conservation.

1,656
Homes in Community

~30 Acres
Irrigated Turf

44,004 sq. ft.
Turf Converted

$27,724
Grant Funding Secured



About FirstService Residential

FirstService Residential is simplifying property management. Its hospitality-minded teams serve residential communities across the United States and Canada. The organization partners with boards, owners, and developers to enhance the value of every property and the life of every resident. Boards and developers select FirstService Residential to realize their vision and drive positive change for residents in the communities in their trusted care. FirstService Residential is a subsidiary of FirstService Corporation (NASDAQ and TSX: FSV), a North American leader in providing essential property services to a wide range of residential and commercial clients. **www.fsresidential.com**.

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