

# The Proposed Redevelopment of the Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor: Balancing Heritage, Progress and Sustainability

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## Abstract

**In time for the 75th Year of the End of the Second World War and the Day of Valor, the redevelopment of the Mount Samat Shrine of Valor as a Tourism Enterprise Zone (TEZ) will be a timely event to commemorate the heroism of those who fought and died for Philippine independence during World War II.**

**The Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor is a National Shrine located in Pilar, Bataan that is dedicated to the heroism and sacrifice of Filipinos who fought and died for freedom against the invading Japanese forces during World War II. It is a 15-hectare heritage attraction on the summit of Mt. Samat, located within a 1,000-hectare forest reserve. Completed in 1970, the shrine consists of a colonnade, connected to a memorial cross by a zigzag footpath on its mountain slope.**

**It will be complemented by a 144-hectare locator site, which be composed of mixed-used activities and open spaces, which will complement the shrine site. Upon implementation, the redevelopment of the Mount Samat Shrine of Valor is expected to become the country's premiere heritage tourism attraction. It would integrate the core principles of valor, patriotism, and heroism with the modern conveniences of a tourism-oriented, multifunctional destination.**

**Overall, Mt. Samat can become the model of a solemn memorial site and the lively ambiance of a visitor recreation attraction. Tourists can expect an exciting and completely integrated destination that will become one of the biggest draws in Bataan and one of the country's significant heritage tourism landmarks.**

## 1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND

During the last century, global conflicts have been significant in the rise and fall of nations. It has also been instrumental in bringing about the worst and the best in humanity. The impact of the First World War, especially the Second World War (WWII) have allowed people to unite and show their strength and courage.

The Philippines, which was a former American colony for three decades, has been significant in supporting the Allied forces in defending democracy. On 9 April 1942, the nation made its last stand when the province of Bataan, surrendered to the Japanese invaders, famously known as the "Fall of Bataan." Three years after, the return of General McArthur in the province of Leyte signaled the start of the liberation of the Philippines and eventually the end of WWII.

In 1966, President Ferdinand Marcos led the commemoration of this historical milestone through the Mount Samat Shrine of Valor or *Dambana ng Kagitingan*. It is a National Shrine dedicated to the heroism and sacrifice of Filipinos who fought and died for freedom against the invading Japanese forces during WWII.

Nestled in the Municipality of Pilar, Province of Bataan, the shrine is a 0.15-square kilometer (15 hectares) heritage attraction on the summit of Mt. Samat, located within a 10- square kilometer (1,000 hectares) forest reserve. The Department of National Defense-Philippine Veteran Affairs Office (DND-PVAO) is mandated to manage and operate the Shrine of Valor.

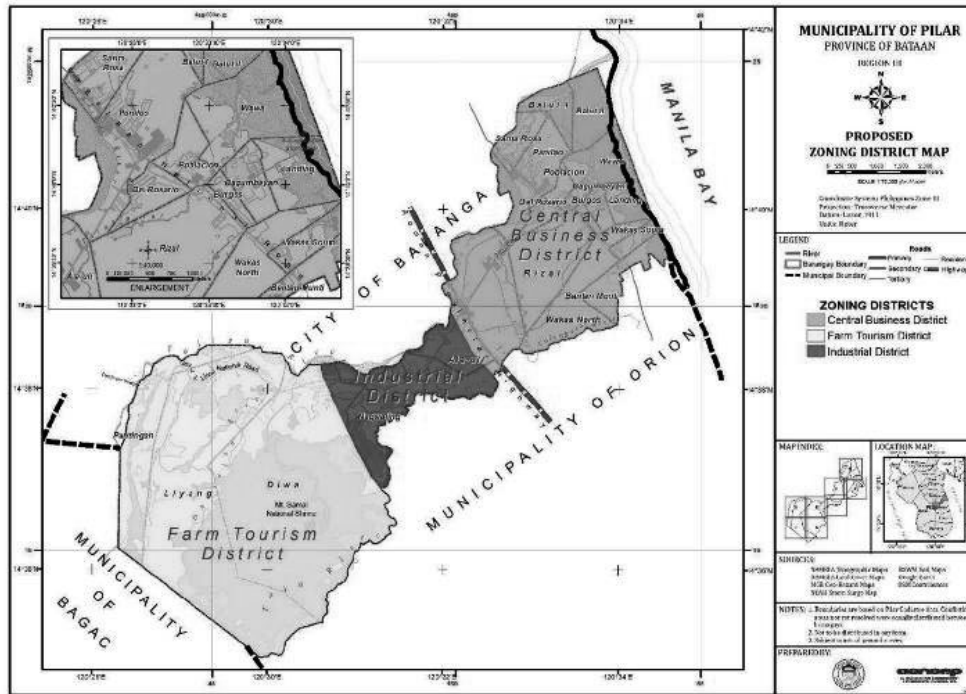


Figure 1. Proposed Zoning District Map of the Municipality of Pilar. Local Government of Pilar.

Completed in 1970, the shrine consists of a colonnade, connected to a memorial cross by a zigzag footpath on its mountain slope. The iconic cross stands at 95 meters (312 feet) with each arm at 15 meters (49 feet), which is thrice the height of Christ the Redeemer, 30 meters (98 feet).

The Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor has been designated by the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) as a Flagship Tourism Enterprise Zone (FTEZ). FTEZs are highly sought-after tourism destination areas, where invested and established tourism enterprises can enjoy lucrative fiscal and non-fiscal incentives specified under the law.

Under Republic Act 9593 or “The Tourism Act of 2009,” TIEZA designates such FTEZs. In collaboration with other government agencies, TIEZA aims to showcase the Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor FTEZ as a model of sustainable tourism development through public-private partnership (PPP). In time for the 75<sup>th</sup> commemoration of WWII in 2020, TIEZA, is in the process of developing the roughly 15-square kilometer (1,500 hectares) of protected area into an FTEZ. It is envisioned to be a model of tourism destination promoting valor, patriotism, and heroism.

## 2.0 MT. SAMAT AND ITS VICINITY

### *Mt. Samat National Park: Profile, Legal Framework, and Planned Development*

In the Philippines, legal instruments like Presidential Proclamations (PP) may protect and designate specific areas as a National Park, Nature Reserve, National Shrine, or Area of Historic Interest. Such cases include the Mt. Samat National Park, which is home to the Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor. Through PP No. 25 and No. 432 (1966), a main reserve of 15-square kilometer (1,500 hectares) and another contiguous property of 0.75-square kilometer (75 hectares) have been identified, respectively.

## 3.0 BATAAN ENVIRONMENTAL AND PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

The Republic of the Philippines is an archipelago of 7,641 islands. The province of Bataan is located in the southwestern part of Luzon, considered a major archipelago. It is within the boundaries of Central Luzon (Region III) and has a land area of 1,373 square kilometer (137,300 hectares), the smallest province in the region. It is also nearly the size of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro.

The province comprises 11 municipalities and one city distributed along its 177-kilometer coastline in the West Philippine Sea and Manila Bay. As a peninsula, the coastline is extensive except in one municipality (Dinalupihan). From the land expanse of Bataan, 58 percent are considered alienable and disposable (A&D), while the remaining 42 percent are classified as forest areas.

As a tropical destination, the province is characterized by Type 1 climate with two distinct seasons – dry (November to April) and wet (rest of the year). Average monthly rainfall is 660 mm. Based on 1971-2000 data, average temperature is recorded at 27.5° C. Mountainous land mass, dominated largely by uplands, hills and mountains, covers 81 percent of Bataan’s entire land area.

#### **4.0 PROFILE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF PILAR**

##### *Physical characteristics*

The shrine is located in the Municipality of Pilar, which is the smallest among the 11 municipalities of Bataan. Pilar has an area of 45.2 square kilometers or 3.4% of the province’s total area. It is bounded on the north by the City of Balanga (Bataan’s capital), on the south by the Municipality of Orion, on the west by the Municipality of Bagac, and on the east by Manila Bay.

##### *Population and urbanization*

Pilar is a third-class municipality with 19 barangays. Its density is nearly twice the provincial average, and the highest in the entire province, given its population of roughly 41,800 and with households numbering to nearly 9,000. Population growth ranges between 2 to 4 percent.<sup>1</sup>

##### *Economic profile*

Pilar boasts of fertile agricultural lands, suitable for rice and crop production, comprising about 55 percent of the town’s total area. Rice production leads as top agricultural product, 90 percent. Vegetable, root crops and fruit production, mainly sweet potato, turnip and watermelon, in contrast, is increasing. The municipality is also emerging as a significant livestock and poultry producer due to contracts from large companies. Secondary and tertiary economic generators are industrial establishments and wholesale / retail trade, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

##### *Tourism*

Tourism is a major game changer in Pilar. As the host locality of the Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor, the town attracts nearly 300,000 (mostly day) paying visitors a year. The shrine operator derives revenues from the shrine through entrance fees, parking fees and rental of facilities.

As one of the major WWII sites, the proposed development is managed by the DND-PVAO. Its operations and cost are subsidized by the national government through the General Appropriations Act.

##### *Transportation*

Mt. Samat of Pilar is accessible through air, land, and sea.

Through buses or private vehicles, the Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor is accessible to land travelers within 3 to 4 hours from Manila via the North Luzon Expressway (NLEX).

While most tourists would usually arrive through the Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Manila, there are airport terminals in Central Luzon. These include Subic Bay International Airport, Zambales and Clark International Airport, Pampanga, which is 40 and 60 kilometers away, respectively.

Via sea vessels, there are three (3) major ports to reach Mt. Samat – the Port of Lamao in Limay; Port of Mariveles; and Port of Orion – with the two latter ports serving passengers as well as roll-on, roll-off vessels for the Bataan-Manila route. The rest are used to transport industrial products.

##### *Utilities*

Water supply at the shrine site is provided by DND-PVAO through a deep well with a submersible pump. Due to the topography of the site, the sewerage system is in the form of individual septic tanks serving toilets and facilities. Drainage is handled by concrete-lined drainage swales along the road in some areas. The electrical power system in the site is served by the Provincial Electric Cooperative (PENELCO). Mobile phone signals are available, but connectivity is difficult and Internet is weak.

## 5. TOURISM STATISTICS AND TRENDS

### *Tourist and excursionist arrivals*

From 2013 to 2018, the total number of travelers in Bataan rose 112,072 to 402,078. (Bataan 2019). However, foreign travelers to Bataan, had been relatively minimal, averaging between 3 to ten percent.

Excursionists are presumably day travelers bound for specific sites, such as the Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor. In 2019, Excursionist Arrival data also showed that Pilar garnered the highest number of excursionists given that it hosts Mt. Samat, at 158,368 out of a total of 546,133.<sup>3</sup>

### *What tourists like about Mt. Samat*

From 2012 to 2014, an analysis was conducted on the review of Mt. Samat (TripAdvisor.com) by visitors. There were 24 reviews, divided equally among Filipinos and foreigners (US and Canadian nationals).

Tourists highly regarded the breathtaking, unique view of Mt. Samat (62%), which is similar to Christ the Redeemer located in Corcovado Mountain; followed by the sights within the shrine – the cross, mountain, flag, war relics, monument, chapel, etc. (38%); fascinating and inspiring historical/learning experience (29%); and basement museum and its contents (25%).<sup>4</sup>

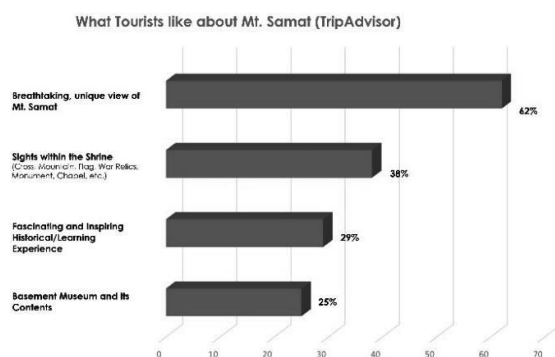


Figure 2. What Tourists like about Mt. Samat. Trip Advisor.

Areas for improvement focused on the elevator and other facilities in need of repair, and the steep challenges of reaching the top of Mt. Samat.

## 6. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR MT. SAMAT

### 6.1. Project Overview

The development of Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor as FTEZ has been guided by sustainable plans and programs specified in the Mt. Samat Comprehensive Tourism Master Plan (CTMP). These features are the actual confines of the Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor; the Locator Site; and the rest of the TEZ which are essentially lush forest lands.

### 6.2. The Shrine Site

As the “gravity point” and center of the TEZ, the Shrine of Valor will set the historic and heritage tone of the area. It will create the overall sense of place, connecting visitors to audio-visual storytelling of the famous battles of World War II, and cultural and social heritage focusing on lessons for future generations on the resolution of conflict and reward for peace.

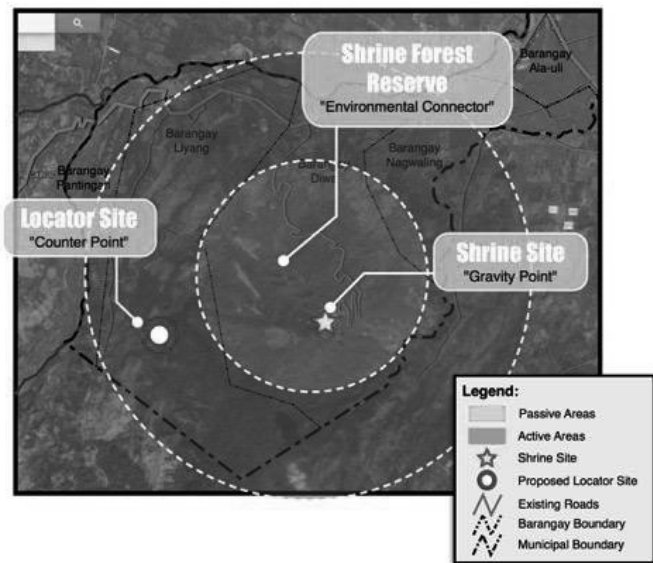


Figure 3. Development and Activity Zoning Map Integrated to the Chosen Physical Development Framework Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA).

**6.2.1. Shrine Site Development**

Divided into two phases, the redevelopment of the Shrine Site will begin in the first five years, focused on immediate physical repairs and landscape treatments. The second phase will focus on new structures and facilities, such as the Center for World War II Studies, new administration office, café and restaurant and stage enhancement.

Based on actual site investigations, and feedback from stakeholders, one of the main priorities is the physical improvement of the iconic cross, which is comparable to Christ the Redeemer of Rio de Janeiro. These will include upgrading of the elevator that allows visitors to see the province from viewing areas of the arms of the cross. Other proposed improvements will include refurbishment of the underground museum and the colonnade.

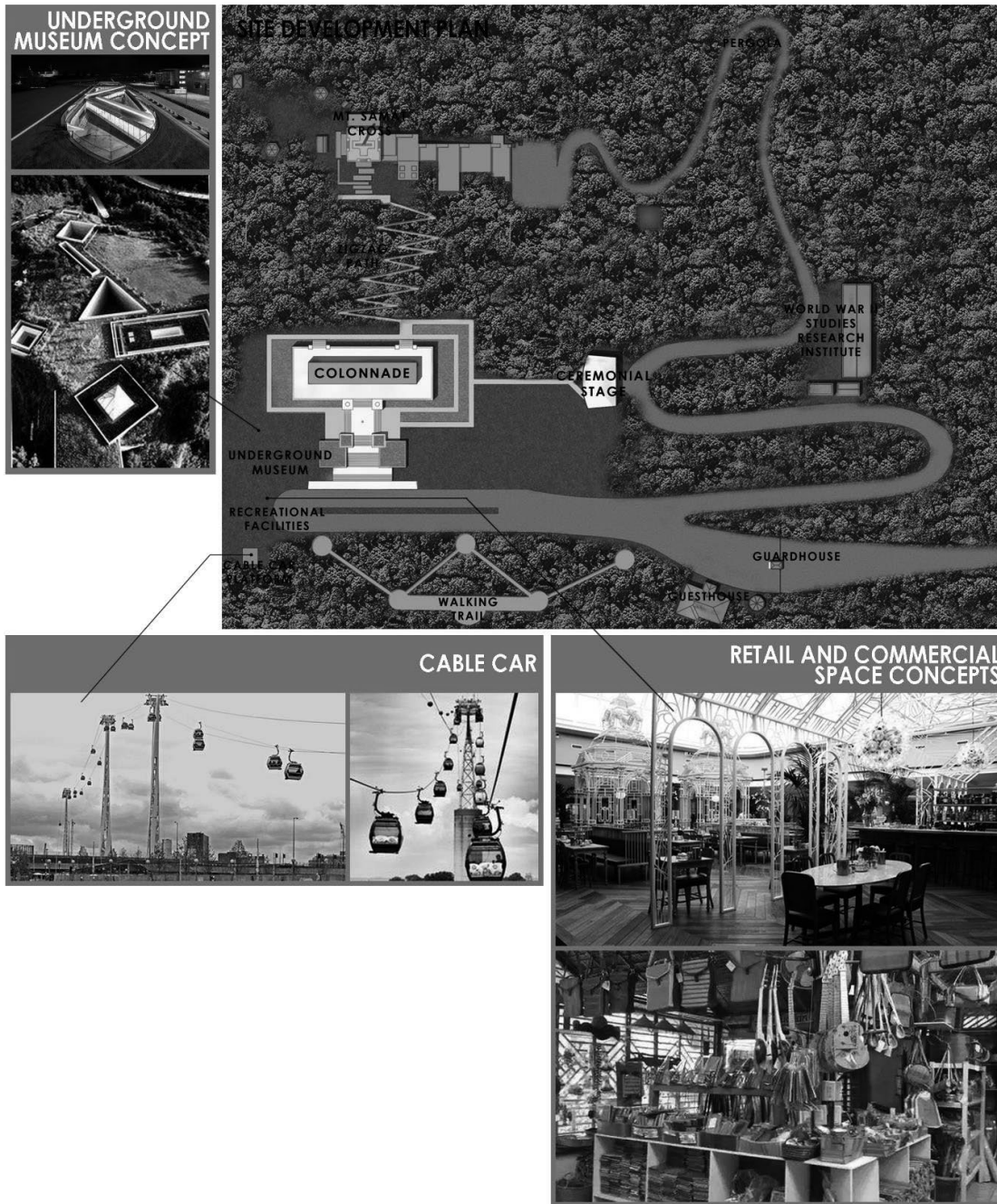


Figure 4. Proposed Redevelopment Plan of the Shrine Site of Mount Samat Shrine of Valor. Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA).

New developments will be the Center of World War II Studies, a Tribute Wall, Redevelopment of the landscape, and transportation options connecting the Shrine and Locator Site through a Cable Car system and electric-powered vehicles have also been recommended. The area of the Shrine Site of 0.75 square kilometer (75 hectares) will also include a forest buffer of 0.50 square kilometers (50 hectares).

### 6.3. *Shrine Forest Reserve*

The Forest Reserve will be the “environmental connector,” of the FTEZ. It will link between the Shrine and the Locator Site, as a green buffer that should greatly enhance the view and the environmental appeal of the site. Limited use for selected activities will be allowed in this area, such as adventure trails, geocaching (a high-tech treasure hunt using GPS or other applications to locate certain spots of interest), canopy walks and bird-watching.

The total Shrine Forest Reserve area of the FTEZ is 8.79 square kilometer (879 hectares). It is meant to protect and maintain Mt. Samat’s remaining core forest environment resources, and is delineated into two sub-zones: a Forest Protection Area, and a Forest Use Area.

### 6.4. *The Locator Site*

Complementing the shrine, the Locator Site will be the income-generating arm of the entire FTEZ and even the community. It has been planned and designed to provide economic sustainability to the place by allowing for mixed-use development involving agri-tourism, health and wellness, nature and eco-tourism, and sports and adventure tourism.

The site will also be anchored to the Shrine, being part of a single experience through the establishment of tomb-like memorial, a remembrance garden courtyard, plazas and squares, and a green reserve.

#### 6.4.1. *Locator Site Development*

The Locator Site is envisaged to be developed with six major component classifications, namely agro-residential, commercial, leisure and recreation, park, forest reserve and memorial circle (reserved for agencies and utilities managing the site). The development area of 144 hectares for the locator site refers to the 10-year Phases 1 and 2 of the Master Plan.

The Locator Site has a total area of 1.44 square kilometers (144 hectares) and is found on the western fringe of the FTEZ. Land use for the area has been designated as follows:

- Agro-residential zone – 0.24 square kilometers (24.5 hectares);
- Commercial zone – a 0.15-square kilometer (15 hectares) mixed-use, sustainable and pedestrian-oriented destination with urban character;
- Leisure and recreational designation of 0.33 square kilometers (33 hectares), which is adjacent to the commercial area;
- Open space designation, consisting of a 0.05-square kilometer (5.9 hectares) Park Zone, which can include sports and recreation areas for jogging, playgrounds, bike trails, etc.; and a 16-hectare Forest Reserve Zone; and
- Memorial Circle Designation, an area in the heart of the TEZ locator site reserved for public agencies or utilities involved in the management of the locator site.
- Transport Hub Overlay Designation

The development within a 10-year period can also include food and beverages establishments, retail shops, department store, organic supermarket, service centers, theaters and cinemas, and other mixed-use structures. Central parking and public transport terminal are also to be provided in the first five years in the Transport Hub, while fruit orchards, agri-tourism establishments, spas/wellness centers, retirement village and residential developments are being conceived in the Agro-Residential area in the same period.

In Phase 2 or the next five years, ancillary services (e.g., health care) are seen to be established in the agro-residential area, while investment in boutique hotels and resorts, specialty retail establishments, and attractions and entertainment will be encouraged in the leisure and recreation area. In the transport hub, a cable car system is expected to be in place by then.

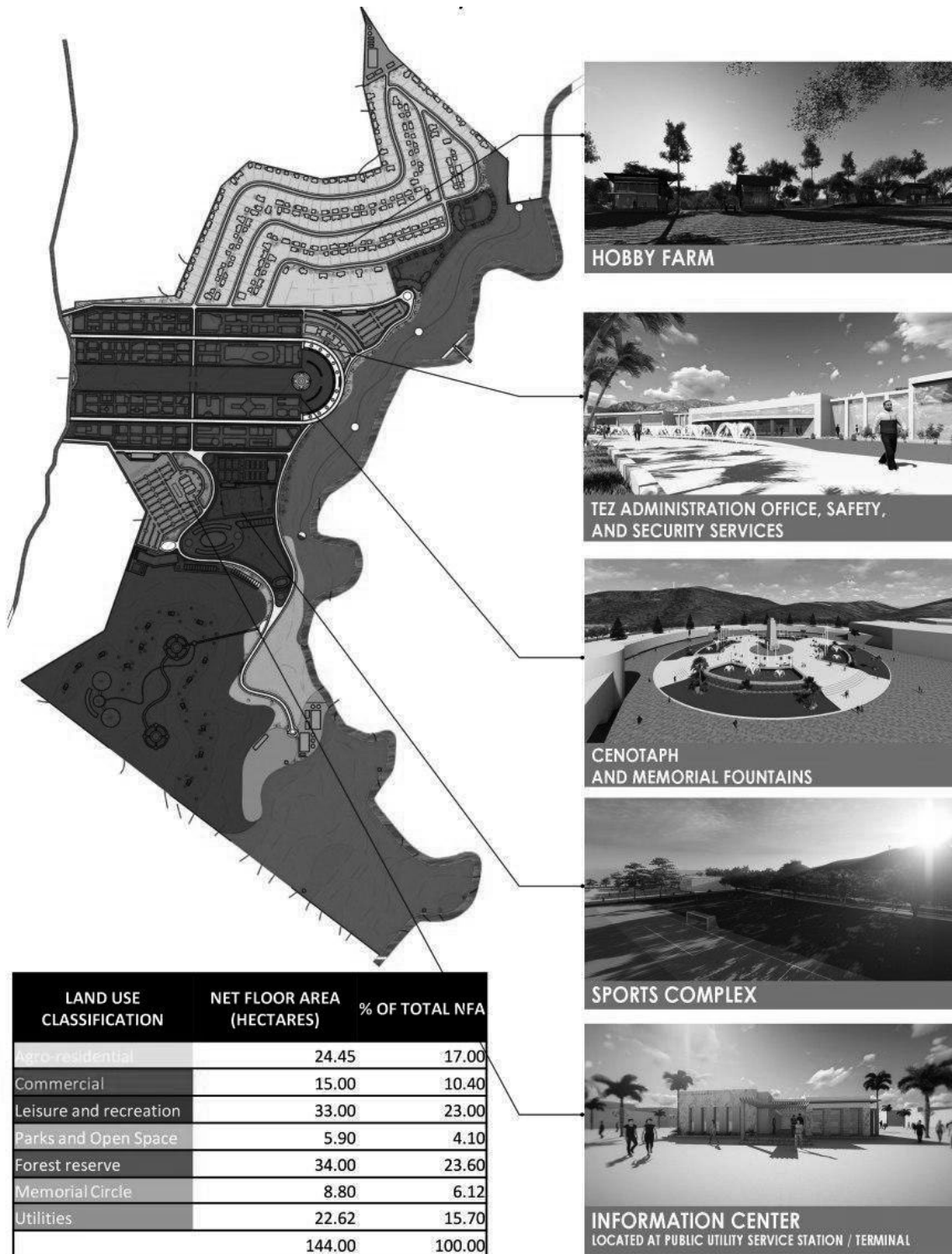


Figure 5. Proposed Master Plan of the Locator Site of Mount Samat Shrine of Valor. Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA).

## 7. Conclusion

Upon implementation, the redevelopment of the Mount Samat Shrine of Valor FTEZ is expected to become the country's premier heritage tourism attraction. It would integrate the core principles of valor, patriotism, and heroism with the modern conveniences of a tourism-oriented, multifunctional destination.

Overall, the Mt. Samat Shrine of Valor is the Philippines' model that effectively harmonizes the solemnity of a memorial ground and the lively ambiance of a visitor recreation attraction. Tourists can expect an exciting and completely integrated destination that will become one of the biggest draws in Bataan and one of the country's significant heritage tourism landmarks.

## Endnotes

1. Bataan Provincial Government, Census, 2019
2. Municipal Government of Pilar. Pilar Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2018-2027, 2018.
3. Pilar. Pilar Tourism Arrival, 2019.
4. [https://www.tripadvisor.com.ph/Attraction\\_Review-g15339227-d2547161-Reviews-Mount\\_Samat\\_National\\_Shrine\\_Dambana\\_ng\\_Kagitingan-Pilar\\_Bataan\\_Province\\_Central.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com.ph/Attraction_Review-g15339227-d2547161-Reviews-Mount_Samat_National_Shrine_Dambana_ng_Kagitingan-Pilar_Bataan_Province_Central.html) Retrieved August 2014