

**ALBUQUERQUE RAIL YARD ADVISORY BOARD  
15 SEPTEMBER 2009**

***SANTA FE RAILYARD MASTER PLANNING***

**STEVEN ROBINSON, PRESIDENT  
SANTA FE RAILYARD COMMUNITY CORPORATION**

**(Aerial 2004)**

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you about the Master Planning of the Santa Fe Railyard. I really appreciate the title you have chosen for this talk, “History of Community Engagement in the Master Planning Effort.” It is the aspect of our work which was unprecedented in Santa Fe and for me it is the heart of the story.

I am one among many citizens who have been concerned for decades with the future of this much disputed property. So many people stood up and participated – each with their own interests and intentions that this story can be told from many different points of view. And collectively, that is the beauty of it – a true community effort, we were all in it together. It was not created through a hierarchy of controlling leadership. So let me say a few words about my participation and then give you my version of the story.

I was motivated by a desire to involve the community in shaping this property. From 1989 to 1998, I helped organize public discussions of the Master Plan proposed by the Catellus Development Corporation, advocated for city acquisition of the property and after the purchase, helped design and orchestrate a community based planning process.

During the past 10 years, I have served as President of the Santa Fe Railyard Community Corporation, a nonprofit which monitored the City's management of the Railyard and since 2002, under contract with the city, has implemented the Railyard Master Plan and Design Guidelines.

In my 9-5 job, I am an architect and planning consultant with a practice in Northern New Mexico. I started my career in New York City where I also cut my teeth on advocacy for the appropriate development of large scale urban projects.

I understand that the Albuquerque Rail Yard Advisory Board has the responsibility to bring forth a Master Plan for your city-owned

property. I have read your ULI Report and would be pleased to offer my thoughts if you are interested. A few months ago you heard Richard Czoski, our Executive Director, speak about the current redevelopment activity in the Santa Fe Railyard. Richard does a brilliant job and I want to thank you again.

Our governing document, the Railyard Master Plan and Design Guidelines, was adopted by the City Council in February 2002. It is actually the third planning effort for the property. Each effort had a profound effect on the subsequent one.

The first Master Plan was proposed in 1991 by Catellus, a publicly traded development company created by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, which owned the property. This Master Plan was rejected by governing authority.

The second effort began after the city bought the property in 1995. The City's Planning and Land Use Department had been directed to design three Master Plan alternatives to present to the public for review and selection. Fortunately, we were able to convince the

mayor to go in a different direction – toward a community based planning process. This is the planning effort I will focus on today.

It was an experiment in deep democracy which resulted in the Community Plan, approved by the City Council in 1997 as a conceptual Master Plan.

This Community Plan became the framework for the third and final effort, the Santa Fe Railyard Master Plan and Design Guidelines. This document, also informed by extensive public participation, provided updated modifications, refinements and substantial details to the Community Plan. It is a Master Plan we have relied upon daily during the past seven years of implementation – and have only rarely had to amend.

**(1982-1995)**

Please note that during the period of private ownership there were extensive City Council and citizen activities on planning the Railyard.

**(1996-2002)**

After the city acquisition came the second and third Master Plan efforts.

Before describing the community based planning process, I want to address the issue of ownership. As you saw, the Railyard had been a target for many years. The town was changing. If we could buy the Railyard, we would have a chance to buck the development frenzy and create an asset for the local community.

By the early 1990s, Santa Fe had become a hot town. Increased development pressures created high land values, higher property taxes, the loss of affordability and the sale of traditional family homes. So this influx of new home buyers caused substantial displacement in many traditional neighborhoods and the subsequent loss of the ties that had bound them together for centuries: family-built homes, multigenerational occupancies, stable ownership and inheritance, familiar street life supported by local churches, schools and cash stores.

In addition, the dramatic influx of tourists changed the historic Plaza from a public realm for local shopping and socializing into a high end consumer venue for visitors. This loss of the traditional communal

gathering place gave specific impetus to getting the Railyard as a place for Santa Feans. Perhaps it could be planned and built for local businesses, recreation and cultural sites for residents of all ages and backgrounds.

The people had seen the developer driven Catellus Master Plan and did not like it. It was planned without community input, required significant municipal funding, demolished the existing buildings, tore out the railroad tracks, proposed inappropriate scale of development, provided uses not desired by the public and projected significant financial benefits to the developer's shareholders without substantial financial or civic return to the local community. We learned what the people did not want.

In order to pursue the desired planning priorities, the City had to buy the land. City Councilor Debbie Jaramillo had been elected Mayor on a progressive platform which included public acquisition of the Railyard. A group of City Councilors were aligned with her. The full story of the public acquisition is one of political intrigue, but for today, let's say it was a very bold move for a small city to negotiate the

purchase, with the assistance of the Trust for Public Land, and to cobble together over 20 million dollars and take this huge leap of faith.

So now let's look in detail at the community based planning process. We had to invent it. Our nonprofit organization, the Santa Fe Land Use Resource Center, faced some thorny questions about a new process:

- What would it look like?
- Who would run it?
- How much would it cost?
- Who would pay for it?
- How long would it take?
- How to get the broadest citizen participation?
- How could this town of unruly, diverse individuals ever buy into one plan?
- How could we craft a process that honored the public purposes and be financially responsible?
- How would we include the forces which opposed the City's acquisition, such as, on one side, the financial and

real estates communities which had lost the market-driven Catellus plan and, on the other side, the group of neighborhood activists who criticized us for being in bed with the city government, and how could we address those who believed that we would promote specific favored outcomes?

Our vision was of a giant funnel, starting with the widest outreach and through an interactive iterative process, narrowing the priorities to achieve consensus on a conceptual plan. It was orchestrated through collaboration between our nonprofit and the City's Planning and Land Use Department, and it would last for 14 months. We raised the money from the City, the Trust for Public Land, the Thaw Charitable Trust, the McCune Foundation and the Frost Foundation.

The mayor wisely required us to run this process jointly with the City's Planning and Land Use Department. It was an arranged marriage. Initially, across the table, the City Staff thought of us as left wing troublemakers and interlopers on their turf. We saw them as dull bureaucrats and timid. It was mostly true. We had months of

negotiations. What kept us working together to craft a planning process was a shared intent for a process that would:

- Be community driven, not developer driven
- Be bottom up, not top down
- Be inclusive, not exclusive
- Be transparent, not under the radar
- Gather expertise from residents, not just professional planners
- Redefine “highest and best use” to achieve social as well as financial goals
- Utilize the public ownership to plan for community values and long term financial return, instead of short term corporate shareholder profit
- Approach the approval process through the strength of public will and civic pride rather than through private sector political influence

So for many of us, the planning process was a continuing journey through uncharted waters. We were driven by this one primary objective: to make the process unfold in full daylight so that all Santa

Feans could understand, engage and actually determine the future of the Railyard property. This transparency encouraged people to come forward at every stage and express their opinions. It enabled each resident to believe that their memories of the place, their hopes for its future, their love of family, neighborhood and community, really mattered; that given the appropriate opportunities, they could speak of these deeply personal experiences, that others were listening respectfully and that just maybe this time the powers that be would respond accordingly. These people were the “resident / experts”. This intention for public awareness was I think the continuous thread that kept people engaged for so many years.

I say “resident / experts” because everyone, each of us, experiences a sense of place. At the Railyard these experiences were often lodged in memories of childhood - kicking ball around the freight cars, seeing a loved one leave for military duty on the train or picking up food distributed during the Depression. This was an industrial site very much a part of the lives of the older neighbors still living next to the Railyard today. In 1991, this place of embodied history, this place of authentic urban fabric, was being slated for complete demolition.

To be eviscerated from the collective memory in order to build yet another false adobe shopping mall, hotel and parking garage.

Our outreach program was bilingual and included the newspapers, radio, leaflets, flyers, notices to churches, schools, neighborhood associations and the Railyard tenants. We announced the agendas for a series of open meetings to be held in the evenings and weekends at different venues around town. Hundreds of people showed up. We presented maps, aerial photographs and began by asking threshold questions.

- Do you want the tracks to continue to the old depot?
- Do you want to keep the industrial buildings?
- Do you want the current legacy tenants to remain on site?
- What are your wish lists for future uses – open spaces, community gardens?
- What should we do about the streets, traffic, parking?
- Do you think we should provide for the possibility that some day there could be a commuter rail to Albuquerque?

- Do you prefer locally owned and local serving businesses?
- How can a redevelopment oriented toward public purpose be paid for?

Each meeting focused on one or more of these issues. We had sign-in sheets. The meetings were often led by people recognized in the community – religious leaders, judges and teachers, along with those of us from the Land Use Resource Center and the City staff. Most of the meetings were orderly and courteous - some elicited heated debate. During each meeting, we asked for a show of hands to see if there was consensus, if not, we kept the question open. Notes were taken continuously on big white pad on an easel. These were transferred into minutes and distributed to the attendees prior to the next meeting. And each meeting started with “Did we get the last one right?” A core of involved citizens kept coming back, and depending on the subject matter, new people showed up for specific issues of their concern.

Within a few months, it was clear that we were getting somewhere. We were building, through this interactive dialogue, agreement on the public will – decisions on large scale planning issues, small questions of specific interest and a host of odd ball preferences. For those who were homebound, unwilling or unable to attend, we commissioned telephone surveys, mailed out written questionnaires and organized door-to-door interviews. Everyone got a pin, a bumper sticker or a hat with a logo saying “I’ve Been Working on the Railyard”. Hokey perhaps, but it created a theme and elicited smiles and a sense of common purpose.

Simultaneously, the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects approached the National AIA to schedule a Regional / Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) charrette to be held at the culmination of our process. I was initially opposed to the idea of outside professionals imposing their vision. But we worked with the AIA to enforce two essential criteria. First, the R/UDAT team members had to be familiar with community based planning, they had to be fully informed of our ongoing process before coming to Santa Fe, they had to be experienced in thinking outside the box and they

had to be willing to get their hands dirty with us and be open to all invested stakeholders.

Second, we built an R/UDAT sandwich. We would have our own design charrette the weekend before the R/UDAT and we would have a final design weekend after the R/UDAT to evaluate, accept, reject or modify their product.

So, in February of 1997, at the Center for Contemporary Arts we setup large tables with Railyard maps. Each table had a local architect or planner to help the people, including teenagers and the elderly, who had never worked on a site plan, to convey their ideas with colored pencils. We supplied pizzas, sodas and lots of coffee for two days. That Sunday evening, we pinned up the schemes, held long debates and agreed to select several crude drawings – full of meaning - to give to the R/UDAT team – actually illustrating the results of 12 months of work. There was a phenomenal feeling of communal accomplishment.

The following weekend, the R/UDAT team got tours of the site and adjacent areas, held dozens of interviews and held their charrette among hundreds of citizens. Their resulting proposal clarified our aspirations, and added invaluable documentation in Guiding Principles, Neighborhood Protection, Governance, Financing and Implementation. The Guiding Principles turned out to be at least as important as the final Site Plan.

### **(Guiding Principles)**

On the final weekend, we met to review the R/UDAT proposal. Again there were heated debates about what they left out or what they got wrong. But with several changes agreed to, there was almost universal buy in. We had, with their extraordinary contribution, reached the narrow end of the funnel and out came a “Community Plan” for the Railyard.

### **(Community Plan)**

In the spring of 1997 the Community Plan was adopted by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Commission. The City Council also approved it but decided to reject the Community Plan recommendation of nonprofit management. Even though cities generally do not manage real estate very well, they created a

department, hired staff and moved forward. The new Railyard Planning Office attempted to renegotiate leases with existing tenants and concluded a park easement with the Trust for Public Land. Most importantly, they commissioned a Master Plan to be based on the Community Plan. During these four years, the Santa Fe Railyard Community Corporation hosted monthly meetings to monitor the City's management and established an open forum for citizens and Railyard tenants to stay apprised of the City's progress.

### **(2002 Master Plan)**

The Master Plan team did a brilliant job of updating the Community Plan using the Guiding Principles. They brought local professional expertise to designing the site, incorporating existing buildings and uses, carefully creating parcels for new development, refining the vehicular and pedestrian networks, grading and drainage and landscaping plans, strong strategies for environmental sustainability and providing extensive Design Guidelines based on industrial and contemporary architectural aesthetics. They accomplished all this in a 12 month period which included extensive public participation and tireless coordination with all relevant city and state agencies.

In 2002, our Railyard Master Plan and Design Guidelines were approved by the City Council. By then, the City realized their control over the Railyard property was something of an albatross and negotiated a 10 year Lease and Management Agreement with the nonprofit Santa Fe Railyard Community Corporation. Once we established the necessary political distance from city hall, we developed constructive relationships with our tenants, private sector developers, state agencies and city staff. Our primary responsibilities have been to negotiate long term leases with the legacy tenants, attract local developers to build according to the proscribed uses and Design Guidelines, to design and build \$13 million of infrastructure and to maintain our fiduciary responsibility to the city. We manage all the public uses on the 13 acre conservation easement -from family reunions to gatherings of 10,000 celebrants. We hope and expect to renew an agreement with the City to ensure that our authority over leases and subleases will enable us to hold the vision of so many Santa Feans and to keep it as a local community asset.

Which in conclusion, brings me back to the subject of ownership. Ownership comes through investment. Over 60,000 Santa Feans

paid for this property through their tax money. They own it. Over 6,000 people participated in the planning of the property. They invested their time, memories, hopes and their ideas. Not everyone got exactly what they wanted, but their willingness to invest in this experiment and to buy into the result deepened their sense of ownership. The Railyard project has succeeded in creating the manifestation of a place which is ours. We own it, enjoy it and are committed to keeping it as a treasured location for them, their families and future generations.

Thank You