

II.

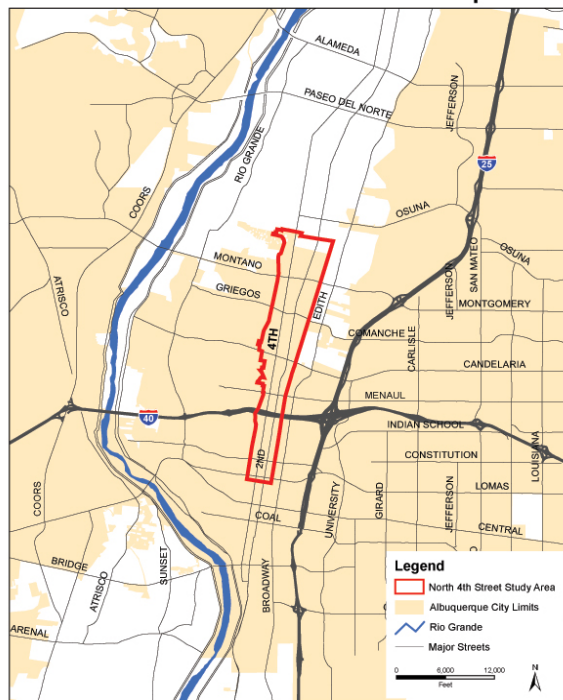
Introduction and History

A. Introduction

The City of Albuquerque plans to redevelop North Fourth Street as a cohesive, integrated transit corridor that promotes shopping, housing, employment, and services and recognizes and builds on existing and potential centers of activity. Over the past several decades, businesses along the street have struggled to remain viable, while traffic and inadequate street design have made the corridor an unappealing place for area residents to shop or walk.

The revitalization area concentrates on North Fourth Street between Mountain Road NW and Solar Road NW, the City’s boundary with Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, a four-and-one-third-mile stretch. The study identifies strategies to make redevelopment possible through public and private investments and policies, as well as public projects that could reinvigorate North Fourth Street and the surrounding area. The map below locates the North Fourth Street Corridor.

North 4th Street Area Location Map



North Fourth Street's development over the course of the early and mid-20th Century is a precursor to the suburban, leapfrog development that characterizes Albuquerque's post WWII growth. The street's uneven historic development pattern has created many of our redevelopment challenges today. Understanding the architectural and planning contexts of the street helps to guide recommendations for physical revitalization.

An 1886 bird's-eye view of Albuquerque

B. History of North Fourth Street

North Fourth Street began around the beginning of the 20th century, at the same time that the automobile made individual travel fast and convenient. Albuquerque had been founded in the area now known as Old Town nearly 200 years before, in 1706. This part of the Rio Grande Valley tended to be swampy and flooded frequently, but over time, families built their homes on higher ground throughout the North Valley, creating small farming villages.

Communities were connected by El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (The Royal Road to/of the Interior Lands), established in 1598 and extending from Ohkay Owingeh (San Juan Pueblo) to Mexico. El Camino Real, also known as the Chihuahua Trail, was the North Valley's first European road.

A common misperception is that North Fourth Street was the historic Camino Real: it was not. El Camino Real had two alternate routes through the North Valley. These were along Edith Boulevard, also known as the Bernalillo Road and through the western portion of the North Valley. Villages including Los Duranes, Los Candelarias and Los Griegos were linked by El Camino Real and residents would have used the road for local travel and regional commerce.



The coming of the railroad in 1880 brought new development to the Albuquerque area. As “New Town,” was developed a mile to the east of Old Town, streets and blocks were platted in a grid system. Turn-of-the-century maps show the grid, and also how sparsely developed the town actually was within a few blocks north of Central (Railroad) Avenue. New Town was 3.1 square miles in extent, with Mountain Road as its northern boundary. North 4th Street began to extend outward from New Town with the advent of the automobile and was Albuquerque’s first street truly formed by the auto and the dramatic changes it brought. As the early decades of the twentieth century proceeded, once undevelopable areas became agricultural lands as drainage projects were constructed, linked to the Downtown by Fourth Street.

In 1910, Albuquerque had 32 registered cars, with only 470 statewide. By 1920, there were 17,720 cars registered in New Mexico and nearly 84,000 by 1930. The explosion of car ownership required well-maintained roads, businesses to sell and repair the vehicles, as well as services for the visitors who had the nearly-overnight freedom to travel throughout the U.S.

The 1904 territorial legislature, having some inkling of the potential for auto travel, designated the first highway, New Mexico Route 1. It followed the Santa Fe Trail from Raton to Santa Fe, then ran south along El Camino Real through Bernalillo and Alameda. It created an extension of 4th Street north of Albuquerque, continued south on 2nd Street at Central to Bridge Street, west to the Barelmas Bridge, then south on Isleta following El Camino Real toward the south, then following the west bank of the Rio Grande down to El Paso. Recognizing an opportunity to tie this state-long route to the historic heritage of the territory road builders named the new road El Camino Real.

In a short period of time, a journey from Albuquerque to Santa Fe that had once taken three days could be accomplished in less than a day. While Route 1, the new

Camino Real, was unpaved for several more decades, its surface was maintained on a regular basis and offered reasonably fast travel. More importantly for Albuquerque, it made possible the extension of urban and suburban development northward from the expanding New Town core.

North Fourth Street had several route numbers and names in the early 20th century, reflecting the developing system of state and national highways, but causing confusion today. Its first official route name was Route 1 and then State Highway 1, named El Camino Real because some parts of the road were on the Camino Real's original alignment. In 1926, North Fourth Street was designated as part of U.S. Highway 85, which extended from El Paso to Santa Fe. Then from 1926 to 1937, North Fourth Street became part of U.S. Route 66, which originally passed through Santa Rosa to Las Vegas, west to Santa Fe and down to Albuquerque. Routes 85 and 66 were considered part of a U.S. Transcontinental Highway.

A U.S.G.S. map from 1938 shows the North Valley's major streets, some of which have since been extended, while others have partially disappeared. The map indicates that there was little connection between the Valley and the largely undeveloped Northeast Heights. The map also shows ditches, drains and laterals. While some remain, others appear to have either disappeared or been rerouted.





Development along North Fourth Street was rarely planned in an orderly, sequential pattern. Some blocks were fully developed, while some had only a few buildings. Some buildings were close to the street, while others were set back. Houses were scattered along the street between commercial structures, including Monkbridge Manor, a grand mansion that stood where the Wells Fargo Bank is located today. Schools, churches, supermarkets, movie theaters, motels, and tourist camps came and went with changes in consumer demand and population increases. Some buildings were demolished, while others remain today, but barely recognizable under decades of remodeling. A single building on North Fourth Street has received State of New Mexico Historic Register status: the Shalit House located at the southwest corner of Douglas MacArthur and North Fourth Street. The house, built in 1940, was converted to Powdrell's Barbecue in the 1980s. It retains its original character and is surrounded by attractive lawns, but was put on the market in 2005, its future uncertain.

Remaining Original Structures on North Fourth Street

A few of the original buildings remain on the street and still retain their original character or style. With rare exceptions, the buildings are one story in height and were constructed economically, in fairly simple styles that reflect their times.

