



Silver Hill Design Guidelines Task Force Meeting

March 22, 2007

Meeting Attendance:

Name	Affiliation	Address	Phone	Email
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Ed Boles	City of ABQ			eboles@cabq.gov
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Meeting Notes:

Design Guideline Process

Ed Boles from the City of Albuquerque explained to the taskforce that the City recognizes there is a need to slow down this process. Rather than produce a draft by the end of the moratorium, this process will be extended beyond the moratorium's May deadline. The goal of extending the process is to develop a more common understanding of the problem, goals of this project, and potential solutions for protecting neighborhood character. Several comments from the public meeting indicated that the process has been moving too fast and people would like it to slow down. People tend to understand and accept change better when it comes more slowly than the process progressed to date. Mr. Boles outlined three premises under which the taskforce will operate from this point forward:

- Silver Hill policies adopted in the University Neighborhoods Sector Development Plan in 1986 have not adequately protected the Silver Hill Historic District in at least one recent project.
- It would be irresponsible for the City not to seek ways to protect the residential and historic character of Silver Hill, in light of the current infill development trend in this and other central Albuquerque neighborhoods.
- The University Neighborhoods Sector Development Plan is the best vehicle for new or amended policies to protect the character of Silver Hill's residential area and historic district.

One of the taskforce members asked about the second premise and the likelihood of a property owner tearing down a single family home in the Silver Hill neighborhood and replacing it with a new single family home. Given current housing prices, is this a real concern? Ed Boles pointed out that it is the City's responsibility to look at development trends city-wide. The Albuquerque market has



been changing in recent years. Infill development is occurring all over the City, and ensuring that it is appropriate infill is a real challenge facing the Silver Hill neighborhood and other Central Albuquerque neighborhoods. Mr. Boles proposed preparing graphic simulations for the taskforce demonstrating what is possible under current zoning and regulations.

Public Meeting Recap

Mikaela Renz asked the taskforce to comment on the public meeting, which took place on February 28. Taskforce members provided the following feedback:

- I understood information and the major issues and thought they were presented well.
- I was disappointed to hear for the 3rd time that this process is a surprise. It is a waste of time to change the past. Focusing on this sets the process up for a negative response.
- Once the participants began focusing on what they *do* want, rather than what they *don't* want, there was a lot of commonality. It was by no means unanimous, but the process didn't feel as divided as it has in the past.
- Since the public meeting, I have been receiving a flurry of emails with an acrimonious tone.

Ed Boles pointed out that the range of possibilities suggested at the public meeting by the City and consulting team raised concerns among the neighbors. We also need to recognize that past conflicts within the neighborhood may affect how people react to this process and its outcome. Slowing down this process will allow the City and consulting team to address these concerns and allow more time to disseminate information.

Taskforce and Consulting Team Roles

Ed Boles clarified the rules for the taskforce and consulting team. The taskforce is a steering committee that will guide the consulting team toward drafting an amendment to the sector development plan, which will eventually be presented to the entire neighborhood, the City Council and the Planning Commission. The taskforce will essentially provide guidance to the consulting team, who is charged with the responsibility of drafting the amendment and presenting it to the neighborhood and City.

Discussion of Neighborhood Pattern and Streetscape Features

The taskforce moved on to discussing the features of Neighborhood Pattern and Streetscape. The taskforce discussed 6 items:

1. Demolition
2. Setbacks
3. Building Spacing
4. Front yard Landscaping and Front yard Walls
5. Off-street Parking
6. Grading and Retaining Walls

For each item, the taskforce followed a worksheet provided by Sites Southwest. While discussing each issue, the taskforce members considered all of the comments provided at the public meeting on February 28 and their personal opinion as a neighborhood stakeholder. Considering all viewpoints, the taskforce discussed the appropriateness of regulating the item. If they felt the item should be regulated, they discussed the effectiveness of current regulations and aspects of amended or new regulations. The consulting team will use this feedback to identify items that need to be researched further and develop a proposal of amended and new regulations.



1. Demolition

Currently, a property owner needs to get a demolition permit to ensure that it is done safely. Effectively no regulation exists for what the taskforce discussed in terms of demolition.

Contributing V. Non-Contributing

There was discussion of regulating based on Contributing versus Non-Contributing buildings. Ed Boles explained that within the historic district there are significant, contributing and non-contributing buildings that were identified when the district was created in the 1980s. While there was general support among the taskforce for regulating the demolition of contributing buildings within the historic district, the taskforce did identify several issues/potential concerns with regulating based on this criterion:

- These labels only apply within the historic district. What about outside the historic district where there are also historically significant properties?
- There needs to be attention given to buildings adjoining the historic district and there may need to be a buffer. Demolition and subsequent new construction or vacant lots surrounding the historic district can also have negative effects on historic resources.
- Because the district was created 20 years ago, there will be a need for more survey work.
- What counts as contributing? Buildings that don't necessarily contribute historically (as defined by the National or State Registers) can still contribute significantly to the neighborhood. We need to ask, Will it be better long-term if the building stays?
- Is there potential to expand the historic district to include more significant buildings?
 - Ed Boles responded to this question. He said that it is probably not likely. When the historic district was created in the 1980s, the boundaries were carefully drawn to include a concentration of pre-WW II buildings. It is not likely that we will be able to justify readjusting the boundaries.
- Whatever demolition regulations are put in place should be sure that review happens on a case by case basis.

The consulting team identified a few potential solutions to address these concerns:

- An Urban Conservation Overlay Zone (UCOZ) can be applied in non-historic areas with identifiable character. However, the UCOZ requires 51% of property owner approval, which can be very difficult to get. Sometimes an UCOZ can be used to buffer an historic district. Perhaps, it may also be possible to identify concentrated groups of neighbors with significant properties who are willing to implement an UCOZ.
- Other cities have a demolition review process, which applies to certain, identifiable buildings. This process provides a built in delay for demolition, in which time the neighbors are notified and there is a concerted effort to identify other options and alternatives to demolition.

In addition to the possibility of regulating the demolition of historic buildings, the taskforce was supportive of the possibility of requiring prior notice to surrounding neighbors for all demolition projects within the entire neighborhood, perhaps building in a delay of 60-90 days.

Ed Boles pointed out that in addition to protecting historic resources from demolition, the taskforce may also want to consider conserving affordable housing.

In summary, the taskforce generally wants to



- discourage demolition of significant properties, including those that aren't necessarily historic but contribute positively to the neighborhood's character;
- regulate the demolition of contributing properties within the historic district;
- require notice of demolition for all properties within the neighborhood;
- research the possibility for regulation of historic properties outside the historic district.

2. Setbacks

Phyllis Taylor pointed out that because there are specific regulations for setbacks identified in the sector development plan, the current setback regulations probably match the historic pattern in the neighborhood. The consulting team will look at aerial photos and drawings and report back to the group about this.

Ed Boles pointed out that setbacks are always given as a minimum, but the group may want to think about setting a maximum setback as well. For example, the new apartment building on Gold meets the minimum requirement but is set farther back than the historic setback of surrounding buildings. Possibilities for addressing this include using an average of setbacks on the block as the maximum allowed or requiring consistency with current pattern. Because these regulations will be enforced by Zoning, it is probably wise to specify an exact formula or number rather than something more vague like requiring consistency with historic pattern.

3. Building Spacing

The taskforce prefers no consolidating of lots neighborhood-wide. The consulting team will research what tools the City of Albuquerque has for regulating this.

If lot consolidation does occur, the taskforce prefers that the new building maintains the space/void rhythm. On larger lots, this may be accomplished through a design overlay zone.

4. Front yard Landscaping and Front yard Walls

Landscaping

The taskforce feels that while this is very important to neighborhood character, it can be easily changed with the next owner. It is also hard to regulate, and the taskforce feels that telling people what kinds of plants they can have may be offensive. Ed Boles pointed out that even in the most regulated areas of Albuquerque with historic overlay zones, landscaping is not regulated. It is too hard to enforce.

Recognizing how important landscaping is to neighborhood character and the potential of an unlandscaped yard to negatively impact the neighborhood, some taskforce members supported the idea of a minimum requirement for percentage of the yard that should be landscaped, but again, this will be hard to regulate and enforce through the Zoning department. It could also be a financial hardship for some neighbors.

The taskforce generally agreed that landscaping should not be regulated but that it should be encouraged, and many of the goals can be accomplished through incentives and education. The Silver Hill Neighborhood Association may be able to provide some incentives and volunteer hours



to help residents landscape. The consulting team will research other city-wide incentives that can apply to the neighborhood.

There is currently a recommended plant list in the sector development. This needs to be updated.

Walls

There was some discussion about materials of fencing. The taskforce would like to research the possibility of specifying the type of wall to exclude chain-link or corrugated metal fences. Razorwire may already be prohibited in residential zones. The consulting team will verify this. Like existing regulations for walls, fencing should be required to be consistent with the building's architecture. Otherwise, except for Lead and Coal, the taskforce does not see a need to change current wall regulations.

Recognizing the special situation of property owners on Lead and Coal, the taskforce would like to see an exception to the current regulation for these two streets. Currently, Lead and Coal property owners need to request a conditional use permit to build a front yard wall over 3 feet. This process requires public notice and a hearing. The standard for making a decision about this permit is, "Would it be injurious to the neighborhood?" The taskforce would like to see an exception to the current 3-foot limit for Lead and Coal so that property owners do not need to go through the conditional use permit process. They propose 4-5 feet for front yard walls.

5. Off street Parking

Enforcement of current regulations would help, including no front yard parking on Silver.

There was a proposal for a regulation requiring all new development to provide 2 off-street parking spaces per unit. Others felt the automobile should be de-emphasized, as driving should be discouraged in the future. Part of being more urban is an expectation that parking half a block away and walking to one's home is perfectly acceptable. Others felt this was too much to ask of residents, particularly in a neighborhood with two major universities and a hospital. The consulting team will research current off-street parking requirements for new development and report back to the group.

On Lead and Coal, current traffic flow and road configuration make it inadvisable to park in front of residences. There are alleys that could potentially be used for parking, but before they can be used safely, they need to be lighted and perhaps paved, or at least upgraded. A separate planning effort to improve Lead and Coal may provide some traffic relief and design measures like bump-outs to make safe parking possible.

Some taskforce members wondered how this group can encourage non-automobile centered development in general. This may be a feature that should be incentivized rather than regulated.

6. Grading/Terrain

The way the grading has been done in Silver Hill is a very important feature that contributes to the neighborhood's character, and the taskforce generally supports maintaining current grades. This could be done by requiring property owners to match grade of property on either side to maintain continuity or requiring it to go through the LUCC to change grade.



Ed Boles pointed out that a regulation needs to be carefully developed so as to allow grades to be restored (for example on Gold where the new apartments are going in).

Next Meeting

The next taskforce meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 3 at 6:00 pm. Ed Boles will confirm the location.

