

II. HISTORIC CONTEXT AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT



Traveling up Central Avenue from Old Town, to New Town (Downtown) and then further up the East Mesa, Central Avenue becomes a time line through history. Architectural style and vernacular mix with national or global events to create unique, discernible neighborhoods that grow younger the further east one travels along Central Avenue.

A. Pre World War II

Central Avenue and its surrounding areas between Girard and Carlisle developed in the late 1920s and 1930s, pre-dating Route 66 and post World War II growth in auto oriented travel and development. In that era development catered to a much more integrated interaction between the area's commercial activity and its residential environments. Though the Nob Hill Business Center was, in the late 1940s, considered to be state of the art auto oriented development, a focus on the pedestrian was still central to the development. That its commercial space was designed to interact with its surroundings on all sides of the building belies its Route 66-era conception. The free-flowing pedestrian entry to the shops and restaurants along Central and in the Business Center encouraged walkability and was dependant upon people who still came and went by foot or streetcar. This sense of continuity between the commercial and residential areas in many ways defines Nob Hill and is responsible for much of its success today.

The Nob Hill subdivisions platted through the 1920s and 30s reflect the evolution of subdivision development through that time period. The Monte Vista (1926) and University Heights (1916)

Additions, located between Girard and Carlisle have narrow, deep lots with alley access to rear yards. Monte Vista Addition is notable for platting that diverged from the typical grid, recognizing drainage patterns, and dedicated land for a school site. Further east, College View Addition (1926), Granada Heights Addition (1925) and Mesa Grande Addition (1931) follow the grid and have narrow, deep lots, but do not have alleys. Residents purchased lots and hired builders or contractors acquired a small number of lots to attract buyers, which created a mix of housing types and styles. Construction on these lots spanned from the 1920 through the 1950s



Broadmoor (1945) began the change to the post World War II pattern of tract housing and a break with the grid platting pattern, with a limited number of streets connecting to the arterials.

Commercial development along Central Avenue served two markets, the residential neighborhoods on either side and travelers through Albuquerque.

The late 1930s saw the realignment of U.S. 66 from its north/south orientation through Albuquerque to an east/west alignment along Central Avenue. By the 1940s and the early 1950s Route 66 had begun

to shape the surrounding landscape. Architectural styles of Route 66 were born of this modern age. Typical development along Route 66 that reflects its function as America's "mother road" can be found in its many gas stations, motor courts, neon signs, and roadside restaurants. Most were designed to attract the attention of people moving through the landscape at speeds only recently experienced with the wide popularity of the automobile.

B. World War II and Beyond

With the entrance of the United States into World War II, Albuquerque assumed a pivotal role in early national defense efforts which later formed the nucleus of the present-day military-industrial complex of Kirtland Air Force Base and Sandia National Laboratory. The location of these facilities south of the Nob Hill Highland neighborhoods helped contribute to the area's desirability.

The area between Morningside and Washington developed in the post war boom of the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. The built environment has some qualities of both the pre- and post-war eras. Some blocks have small scale shop frontages close to the street while other buildings step back allowing for a shallow parking lot, while still others swim in vast seas of parking forsaking the pedestrian almost completely. Residential development also changed. Lots became wider and shallower as the orientation of houses began to change. The garage that was detached and accessed from the alley or a long driveway moved forward and became integrated into the house, accessed by a driveway from the front. Ranch style houses and modernist architecture began to appear interspersed within the established architectural vernacular. Development also began to occur in large sections with contractors building the same or similar houses on one or more blocks.



The Highland area from Washington to San Mateo also developed during the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. However, zoning codes favored single use buildings and a separation of these uses from the surrounding residential areas. R-1 (single family residential zoning) gave way to R-3 (highest density residential zoning) in a bid to help alleviate housing shortages. Duplexes and courtyard style apartments gave way to larger buildings with more parking lots and as a result are less integrated into their surroundings. Dwellings in this area were assumed to be served by shops and amenities that would be reached by car. Central Avenue widened; buildings receded behind expansive parking lots separating commercial and residential districts. The later the development the more automobile oriented it became with little or no consideration for the pedestrian environment. East of the Hiland Theater the commercial areas are dominated by much larger stores surrounded by equally large parking lots. Central Avenue widens to six lanes and on-street parking has been eliminated in most blocks. Where buildings are set back with parking in front, the development pattern discourages walkability, street activity and neighborhood integration.



The Nob Hill commercial strip began a long period of decline in the early 1960s. Development of the Winrock and Coronado shopping malls along with construction of the interstate highway network

altered growth and transportation patterns citywide and shifted commercial focus away from Route 66. The community turned to the new malls to meet many of their shopping needs, while the Interstate diverted much of the traffic that once flowed on East Central. As a result, the prestige of the Nob Hill business district diminished, and the area lost its former luster. Buildings deteriorated, and uses changed.

C. The Recent Past

By 1987, at the behest of Nob Hill's neighborhood and business associations, a sector development plan was drafted and adopted by the city of Albuquerque. Part of the 1987 plan included a Nob Hill Study, that looked at housing stock, neighborhood character, areas of concern and attitudes of local residents. One result of the study was the placing of many homes and buildings on the Historic Registry as many were reaching approximately fifty years in age or older. With this renewed interest and perspective on Nob Hill's place in history, property values began to rise attracting economic activity as well as working professionals and their families. By the mid 1990s Nob Hill area was carving out a unique and livable place in the city.

The Highland area was not included in the 1987 plan. Highland was also greatly affected by the construction of the new malls as it was previously Albuquerque's new uptown area. Standing in relative isolation, the Bank of the West building is indicative of this halted economic development in the Highland area. While Nob Hill was experiencing relief from the disinvestment of the 1980s due in part to its maturation as a historical neighborhood in Albuquerque, Highland experienced some development of chain stores and retailers, but largely lagged behind Nob Hill.

Highland, however, seems to be on the same path that Nob Hill was on a few years before. Many of the homes and buildings are now reaching 50 years old, with the potential to be recognized as historic based on their age, contribution to the chronicle of Albuquerque's past, and presence of original design and materials. In 2005 the Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) plan saw the Hiland Theater as one of the neighborhood's assets and looked to it to help anchor redevelopment. Though Highland does not have the built foundation that Nob Hill has of its mix of pedestrian friendly shops and housing, it is finally coming into its own and many see its more open form as an exciting place from which to start again and create a highly livable, viable and successful urban landscape.



Today, the Nob Hill Highland Area plays host to a range of businesses, restaurants and activities. Transit opportunities have increased with RapidRide bus service and the University's presence adds to local vibrancy. However, concerns about traffic flow, pedestrian safety, crime, economic activity and the built environment persist. It is in this context that this plan aims to pick up where the 1987 plan left off. By building on the strengths of previous plans and the energy of community stakeholders, this plan will be an effective blueprint for the future.



D. Historic Preservation

Today in the Nob Hill Highland area, the issue of maintaining its historic feel and character is as important as ever. Historic preservation is a primary goal of the plan.

As the Plan area furthers the creation of its identity as a walkable, urban area in Albuquerque, there is a desire by area residents to protect, preserve and enhance historic sites along the commercial corridors as well as in the residential neighborhoods. These places are a large part of what makes the Nob Hill Highland area special, contributing greatly to its character. The phenomenon of tearing down or extensively remodeling houses that have contributed to the historic character of the neighborhood is also a serious threat as it can change building massing on the lot, solar access, streetscape and architectural style. Residents believe that it is important to preserve the historic quality of their neighborhood, maintaining sympathetic architectural forms, building massing and streetscape. Furthermore, the State and National Historic Register designation are important resources for documenting and maintaining the area's historical fabric as well as educating the public at large about the history and significance of structures and building styles in the area.

An inventory of historic buildings conducted in 1995 by the City of Albuquerque and volunteer researchers surveyed as many buildings in Nob Hill as possible to complete basic historic research to lay the groundwork for identifying potential historic districts. Inventory forms were completed for approximately 615 residential and commercial

structures. An additional 415 previously surveyed buildings were field checked for major, subsequent modification, and basic dating research was completed for all 1,030 survey forms. The inventory information included a preliminary assessment of the contributing/non-contributing status of each building for potential future historic district and building registrations.

The building survey and research noted that residential areas north of Central had significant concentrations of buildings that would likely be contributing in an historic district, and the Monte Vista and College View Historic District was placed on the State Cultural Properties register in 1998 and the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

Residential areas south of Central were also identified as having registration potential, and the inventory final report concluded that a survey of the University Heights neighborhood and portions of Granada Heights should be completed.

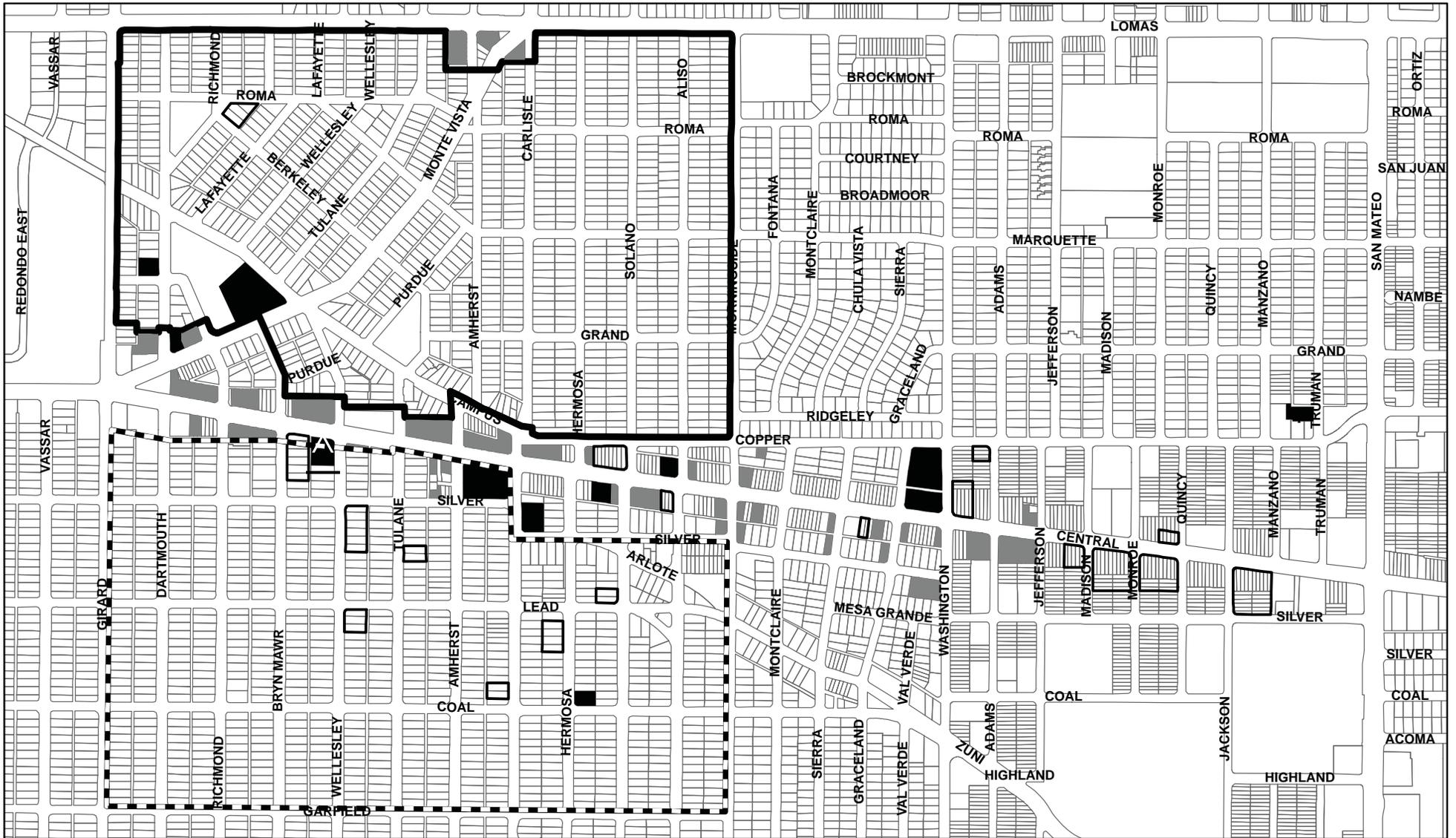
The report identified individually-listed commercial, institutional and residential buildings on the State and National Registers and identified additional buildings for nomination. The report identified notable buildings constructed from 1942 to 1952 and recommended that these commercial areas be reassessed after 2002 for potential listing on the State and National Registers.

Further historical research was completed for the City of Albuquerque by Parsons Brinckerhoff in March of 2005 in the form of a Cultural Resource Survey of the properties bordering Central Avenue. This cultural resource investigation was conducted under New Mexico State Archaeological Survey Permit No. 04-079 and 05-079 and was consistent with the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended through 1992.

A map of the Plan area shows State and National Register Historic buildings in dark blue, State and National Register Historic Districts in yellow, buildings of potential historic interest in light blue and areas of potential historic interest in light red (see Figure 3). Other historic neighborhoods and structures remain to be surveyed in greater detail and evaluated for inclusion on the State and National Register.

Other recommendations of the 1995 building inventory were that the City consider Historic or Urban Conservation Overlay Zones for registered districts. The report also noted the importance of public education and recommended brochures and walking tours and workshops to encourage preservation-sensitive remodeling and a greater appreciation of the historic quality of commercial structures built through 1955. The intent of such measures would be to encourage renovations that are sympathetic and respectful of the historic character of these neighborhoods.





Nob Hill Highland Sector Development Plan

0 250 500 1,000 2,000 Feet



Recommended for Further Study

Characteristic Buildings

Buildings/Places of Historic Interest

Monte Vista & College View Historic District

Buildings on National and/or State Register

City Landmark - Jones Motor Co., 3222 Central SE

Historic Buildings/Districts

Route 66 Neon Signs on State Register

- Aztec Motel, 3821 Central NE
- Nob Hill Motel, 3712 Central SE
- Premier Motel (3 signs) 3822 Central NE

Figure 3: Buildings and Districts of Historic Recognition or Interest



