

**Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency (MRA)
East Gateway Metropolitan Redevelopment Area
2nd Focus Group Meeting: Juan Tabo to Eubank
May 4, 2010**

Manzano Mesa Multi Generational Center Room #5
6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

Attending Staff

Gabriel Rivera, Project Manager, COA Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency

Susan Vigil, MRA Intern

Barbara Herrington, Sites South West Project Planner

James Arranda, Project Planner Sites Southwest

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

1) Introduction MRA

Gabriel Rivera of the City of Albuquerque Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency opened the meeting by briefly explaining the purpose of the MRA plan and the public process thus far. Barbara Herrington introduced attending planning staff and consultants then gave a brief description of the study area boundary.

Next, Ms. Herrington reviewed the MRA information handout and explained that the MRA Plan does not touch on zoning, which is the role of a sector plan. The Sector Plan spells out what people want to see in a general area, while an MRA Plan is site or project specific.

A charter member of the East Gateway Sector development plan attending the MRA meeting questioned if the MRA planning process is simply duplicating the Sector Development Plan. Ms. Herrington answered that the MRA Plan will be more project-oriented. Mr. Rivera concisely explained, “The difference between the MRA Plan and the Sector Plan is that the MRA Plan will actually work to put funding in place for specific projects; the sector plan identifies issues and future land uses but doesn’t specifically work towards obtaining funds and implementing projects.

Ms. Herrington then gave a brief update of the planning process and meeting participants introduced themselves.

2) MRA Incentives

Metropolitan Redevelopment areas benefit from government investment incentives such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF). As conditions improve in a TIF area, the tax dollars from those improvements are set aside to be reinvested in the area. TIF designation allows an area’s tax dollars to stay in that area instead

of being spread all across City. Property taxes are not controlled by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency but by the County Assessor's office and legal assessment practices.

In addition to the benefits of TIF redevelopment funding, East Gateway area developers are eligible for City bonds. Furthermore, Metropolitan Redevelopment Areas are not subject to pay impact fees for commercial property or affordable housing developments. For instance, if businesses want to expand operations, City impact fees would be set at zero. This is money in the business person's pocket.

The staff of the Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency will help find the funding for projects as exemplified by the MR Agency's work at the Verizon facility on Albuquerque's west side, for which the necessary infrastructure and landscaping were purchased. The MR Agency was also able to purchase an old junk yard in this area and clean it of environmental contamination using National Environmental Protection Agency Brownfield funding. The junk yard property is now the promised site for a westside library, transit center, satellite health clinic and future retail center.

The MR Agency facilitates public-private collaborative partnerships which can be difficult to create. MRA projects require \$10 public dollars for every \$1 contributed by the City of Albuquerque. Large or small catalytic projects are encouraged to spur redevelopment in an MR area. It took seven years to purchase the Blue Spruce Bar, a problem property on the southeast corner of Alcazar and Central. Surrounding neighborhoods focused their collective pressure on the owner of the Blue Spruce property until the owner eventually agreed to sell. In a different part of the city, known as the Near Heights MRA, the City widened side walks and put in artwork around the Ta Lin market. A CVS Pharmacy is expected to locate close to the Ta Lin, enhancing the international market's commercial locus.

Barbara Herrington described 5 East Gateway redevelopment opportunity sites identified by previous meeting attendees. The City owns one of the sites and the state owns one other. The mobile home park east of Eubank Blvd. on Central Ave is owned by the State of New Mexico and measures 8.64 acres. One meeting attendee stated that she would not like to see the park used as a park, as suggested in the DRAFT East Gateway Sector Plan, page 7-2, because a park would be a magnet for transients

3) Safety and Lighting

According to meeting attendees, public safety is a very big problem. Late at night, no one watches the park and-ride drop off. Transients collect at the end point. Big tracks of vacant land in the area draw more transients and effectively camouflage homeless camps from officers' surveillance. Entertainment venues attract vandalism and gangs. Businesses that attract after-hours patrons are

viewed as problem sites. Window break-ins are common. The closest police substation is found at Kathryn and Louisiana, outside the East Gateway MR Area. Unless the area can be rid of extreme vandalism and vagrancy, higher end restaurants and businesses will not survive. Attendees asked whether the MRA could purchase problem properties in areas where homeless people and drunks congregate. Mr. Rivera answered that, if these properties are for sale, their purchase is a possibility.

Alleviating darkness throughout the corridor is a fundamental crime reduction measure. I-40 to Central, on all connecting roads, presents dark passages at night. At one time, East Central glowed with neon lights, guiding travelers down Route 66. The MRA installed fun Route 66 neon signs on West Central. Similar gateways and markers on East Central could illuminate and cheer travelers.

4) Trailer Home Centers

The East Gateway area is home to a concentration of trailer home and RV sales businesses. Representatives of this business sector were present at the 2nd MRA focus group meeting. According to these businessmen, trailer home/RV Sales operations were originally located on the west side and re-located to East Central at the urging of the City. They are nicely kept properties. The East Lomas auto sales strip in combination with mobile home/RV sales on East Central create a critical mass of dealership businesses allowing consumers to conveniently shop in a single area of town.

According to East Gateway business owners, trailer home/RV sales observed a decline in business from it's hey day in the 1960s and 1970s. Due to tremendous changes on Wyoming and Eubank, the mobile home commercial focus is being taken over by new ventures. Trailer homes/RV sales operations declined from approximately 46 in the 1990s to 6 or 7 in 2010, leaving acres of vacant land.

Trailer home/RV sales require large tracks of land unavailable in other parts of the City. These business owners expressed frustration with the City for not supporting their industry's relocation on East Central. One businesses owner stated that the East Gateway, "is a good place to foster the [trailer home/rv sales] businesses; customers can shop for trailer homes in one place, in a centralized area. These businesses provide for a need."

5) Roads and Bicycle Lanes/Walking Paths

A representative of the South Los Altos Neighborhood Association reflected that bicycle lanes on Central would be dangerous. Area residents think bicycle lanes on Copper are necessary to channel bicyclists to and from the mountains and Sandia National Laboratories. Nicely lighted walking paths are also welcomed.

6) Business Access, Juan Tabo/Buena Ventura south of I-40

Many people said that business access is a major impediment at intersections all along Central and for businesses located close to I-40 within the East Gateway MRA area.

Attending property owners from the mall on the west side of Juan Tabo and Buena Ventura, just south of I-40, described problems with building access. They described this commercial space as attracting long-term, owner-occupied businesses. Before the freeway was built, this mall was spacious. When I-40 was constructed, Juan Tabo was narrowed and the mall was placed in road bays and set back from Juan Tabo with parking placed to the businesses' front.

Presently, the mall is very cramped. Customers become trapped in the mall's bay, and access to the mall is restrictive. For instance, 332 Juan Tabo cannot be accessed without crossing 315 Juan Tabo. These businesses pay Juan Tabo prices to occupy the site, though there is no access from Juan Tabo. The side walks surrounding this mall are elevated high off the ground. The City guardrail surrounding the mall is badly maintained. There are no lights from I-40 to Juan Tabo.

The property is rezoned as SU-2/EG-NAC (Neighborhood Activity Center) in the DRAFT East Gateway Sector Plan. The DRAFT sector plan describes this zone as pedestrian-oriented in design, and intended to provide a mixture of services including residential building types. The current zoning of C-3 is of concern to the mall's business owners. One business person suggested the best development for the area would be increased industrial use. It was also suggested that re-parceling the land into bigger lots could alleviate some of the access issues. The mall could also be redeveloped as a large freeway hotel. At the very least, according to meeting attendees, the Juan Tabo/Buena Ventura mall should be made more attractive.

7) Character of the Roadway

Much of the East Gateway area was built recently. The corridor should develop enough character to draw people from I-40 onto Central Ave. for a taste of Albuquerque. A transportation hub, more museums, a visitor's center, and playing on the area's natural amenities will interest Albuquerque visitors.

An area neighborhood representative stated she did not want East Central to look like Nob Hill, but instead believes the corridor should develop its own distinct character. Nob Hill's heavy emphasis on street fronts and the urban trend of building placement up to the sidewalk is uncharacteristic of the East Gateway area, according to this individual. Another individual said the new senior living housing development on Central and Tennessee was a bad idea

ABQ Uptown's style of development was popular with meeting attendees. New commercial developments will have to cater to both the upscale East Gateway housing developments and the lower income multi-family housing found in the

area. In order to accommodate a large library, the character of Central needs to change.

8) Community Vision for the East Gateway

a) Location

- Two entrance focus points, one at Juan Tabo and Central and another at Tramway and Central will emphasize the area attractions.
- Passers through will be able to savor a taste of Albuquerque and can jump back on the freeway.
- Improve the signage on the Interstate.
- Draw people off I-40 into the area
- More people on Central will help businesses
- It is the gateway east into the Sandia Mountains and the gateway west to Albuquerque

b) Gateway Commercial and Neighborhood Amenities

- A fine art gallery, museum, shopping, hospitality centers, and transportation hub will captivate travelers with Albuquerque's gifts.
- Presently the government, neighborhoods, and businesses are enthusiastic to see the area's potential fulfilled. How can this energy be channeled?
- The people are protective of Kirtland Air Force Base traffic. Access to the base is a popular and important concept.
- The East Gateway is the beginning of Route 66
- The Route 66 signs on West Central as an example of MRA branding/gateway activities

c) Natural Amenities

- As travelers pass through Tijeras and Carnuel canyon, the mountains offer pretty views, opening finally to Albuquerque spread below the Sandias.
- New Mexico landscapes surrounding Albuquerque caress the eye, opening fully to the Sandias, Volcanos, City lights, and west side mesas, opening fully between Tramway and Juan Tabo.
- Little parks along the freeway like the one at Tramway and Central will emphasize the Gateway's beauty. (Suggested location: Juan Tabo and I-40)

9) Assets/ Needs/Development

a) Assets

- The Tijeras Arroyo Open Space is beautiful and attracts visitors to the East Gateway.
- There are excellent vantage points for bird watching in the East Gateway
- The Park-and-Ride carries people to the neighborhood to visit enjoy and shop in the neighborhood.

- People gather at the Albertson's Parking Lot at Central and Tramway, before embarking on Sandia mountain adventures.
- The East Gateway has an "out-doors" image; how can this image be built on? How can the Gateway's use as a mountain gathering point be built on?
- Active areas include smaller, business friendly strip malls between Juan Tabo and Eubank
- Good commercial outlets include: Surplus City, Mobile Home Businesses, Dions, and the American Legion.
- Sandia Technology Park, just east of Eubank
- The National Museum of Nuclear Science, southwest corner of Eubank Blvd. and Southern Ave.
- Publicly active and well kept neighborhoods are found just 1 block of Central
- Homeowners associations in the area can spread the news that the old grocery store at Juan Tabo and Central (known as Franklin Plaza) is a possible redevelopment site. The Redevelopment Agency could begin raising government funds and support for this property's purchase. It should be developed by a local grocer like John Brooks Grocery, The Farmer's Market, or Sunflower Grocery.

b) Needs

- There are no U.S. Post Offices in the area.
- There are no nice upper end restaurants with liquor licenses.
- The east side of Central off Eubank hasn't had much commercial success besides Sonic.
- Spot medians on Central that don't interfere with consumer traffic or ingress and egress of mobile home sales.
- Purchase problem properties
- Better access to businesses
- Better lighting
- A Businesses Center
- A transportation hub
- More museums

c) Commercial Development

- Old Businesses are owner-occupied (30, 40, 50-year-old establishments).
- Newer businesses lease
- Business owners requested more City infrastructure. Between Juan Tabo and Tramway is a hodge-podge of development, no consistent theme.
- Attendees questioned "How do we invite more attractive development?"
- A good marketing study for site development describes available infrastructure services.

- The developer will consider whether good roads, water and sewer are present
- A redevelopment property also requires a marketing study and existing infrastructure availability.

This meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.