

East Gateway Metropolitan Redevelopment Area
Segment 3 Focus Group Meeting: Juan Tabo Blvd. –Tramway Blvd.
Manzano Mesa Multi-Generational Center
July 20, 2010; 6:30 p.m. -8:00 p.m.

Attending Staff

James Aranda, Sites Southwest Project Planner

Susan Vigil, Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency Intern

This meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm

1.) Orientation and Introductions

Ms. Vigil began the meeting by explaining to attendees the process of MRA designation and plan creation. Five public meetings have been held to discuss redevelopment options for the East Gateway Metropolitan Redevelopment Area, including a special East Gateway Business Owner's meeting held April 29, 2010. The plan is expected to be ready for review by Albuquerque City Council by early 2011.

Ms. Vigil described the typical Metropolitan Redevelopment Plan as consisting of at least three different elements: A market analysis; identification of opportunity sites for catalyst economic development, and a description of the area's assets, opportunities and community processes. Once a plan is approved, the Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency will explore financing sources and possibly acquire property in the East Gateway MRA for redevelopment. The City then may solicit Requests for Proposals (RFP), development proposals for specific parcels owned by the City, issued by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency and crafted to reflect the community's redevelopment preferences.

The Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency is further able to channel façade improvement monies and community and family housing funds into distressed redevelopment areas. One useful tool is Tax Increment Financing (TIF), which is an assessment valuation technique used to reinvest the incremental increase in property values due to improvements made in redevelopment areas back into those areas. Ms. Vigil drew on examples of past redevelopment projects such as the West Central MRA Plan that included building a new clinic, library, and transportation center planned for the corner of Unser Blvd. and Central Ave.; and the Near Heights MRA that slowed for the demolition and planned redevelopment of the Blue Spruce property found on the southeast corner of Alcazar and Central. Both of these acquisitions and subsequent redevelopments were strongly supported by the surrounding communities. Community and neighborhood support is vital to the success of redevelopment efforts.

James Aranda, project planner for Sites Southwest, initiated introductions of all meeting attendees, and asked them to explain why they choose to locate in the redevelopment area. Most of the meeting's attendees have been in the East Gateway MRA area for over 10 years. Reasons given for locating to the area includes:

- Historical property acquisition
- Attracting tourists to the hospitality industry
- Housing close to work
- Exceptional bus service along Central
- Proximity to the freeway
- Available office and warehouse space
- Large vacant lots
- Retail shops

2.) Redevelopment Preferences and Problems

Mr. Aranda elicited attendee's preferences for redevelopment in the East Gateway area, specifically from Juan Tabo east to Tramway. A post office is needed in the area, including P.O Boxes. A recycling center was suggested as a good use for large vacant parcels in the East Gateway Area. Residents and businesses have repeatedly submitted a united request for a local and more organic grocery store to be located towards the western boundary of the East Gateway MRA area. The empty grocery store front on the north-east corner of Juan Tabo and Central is an eye sore and should be reopened as a local, holistic grocery, if possible.

Business owners in the area questioned the uses allowed by the new zoning proposed by the DRAFT East Gateway Sector plan. The new zoning will replace existing commercial zoning. Planning staff explained the new zoning is more permissive than the existing C-3 zoning; however, it includes design regulations and is activated by substantial renovations or new building on a site.

City code enforcement personnel should be called upon to clean up problem properties. One meeting attendee complained of trash and weeds built up behind the Bingo Parlor on the north-east corner of Juan Tabo and Central. Ms. Vigil clarified to meeting attendees that Code Enforcement responds to calls from concerned citizens. She offered to provide the name of a responsive code enforcement officer at the next East Gateway MRA meeting.

Retail preferences for the area varied from large outlet centers, like Hinkle Family Fun Center and an REI outdoor supply shop, to small mom and pop and locally owned restaurants and a gym. Residents are enthusiastic over the prospect of attracting sit-down restaurants that serve wine and beer.

Mr. Aranda inquired about residents' stance on affordable housing and live-work units in the area. Attendees responded that the area is already inundated with affordable housing and that both the hotels and apartment complexes are lending a

down-graded appearance to the neighborhood. The big hotels, on large properties along North Central and Tramway by Dorado exhibit little to no landscaping. Mr. Aranda described Albuquerque's affordable housing to be of a high standard, sometimes above those seen in commercial developments; for instance, Sawmill apartment complex.

Mixed income, and mixed use housing was agreed upon by meeting attendees as a good option for the East Gateway Redevelopment area. If mixed-use and income housing is constructed on Central, it should be accompanied by neighborhood amenities such as parks and parking. A park in the area would enhance the area's appeal, as well as a library. The business owner's attending the meeting expressed strong support and enthusiasm for live-work units.

According to meeting attendees, the area will greatly benefit from well lit walking trails, (such as those seen on Juan Tabo and again on Southern), wider roads, streetscaping, and business landscaping. Businesses need incentives to landscape their properties. La Puerta Lodge exhibits more landscaping than most businesses in the area. Mr. Aranda noted that a sector plan has the authority to require businesses to landscape their properties and bordering side walks. Ms. Vigil made clear that landscaping may only be recommended in an MRA plan. City zoning code also requires 15% of the net lot area of a commercial development (minus the building footprint) to be landscaped.

3.) Opportunity Sites

Mr. Aranda reviewed and requested input on the opportunity sites thus far identified in the planning process:

- Northeast corner of Juan Tabo and Central (the Franklin Plaza)
- Parcels just east of Eubank, on both sides of Central now vacant and owned by the State of NM. The southern parcel is a former mobile home park; the north Central located lot may have already been purchased
- Lot just west of Dorado Pl. on the north side of Central

Meeting attendees requested the additional opportunity site at the Southwest corner of San Pedro and Central known as the Old Furrs Cafeteria be investigated as a possible opportunity site. This is *not* within the East Gateway MRA boundaries; however, it is located in the Near Heights MRA boundaries. Residents suggested reusing this site as a gym, entertainment center, or grocery store.

4.) Roadways, medians, and lighting

Business person's attending the Segment 3 East Gateway Focus Group meeting expressed concern over traffic calming measures planned for East Central, specifically the installation of medians. Several attendees felt that the open 'suicide lane' is helpful in accessing their businesses. At Eubank, for instance, this middle turning lane helps customers turn into businesses

without blocking traffic. Also the traffic leaving and entering Costco and Home Depot, just south of Central on Eubank, is facilitated by the middle lane in this area. Meeting attendees feel that mid-block access to businesses along East Central is essential. However, business owners recognized the need for medians at main intersections.

Lighting and crime are an ever-present concern to East Gateway area residents and businesses. Juan Tabo traveling south to Central is a particularly dark area.

5.) Character

Meeting attendees expressed enthusiasm for better defining the character of the East Gateway MRA area. Suggested themes include:

- Southwestern themes, with native landscaping drawing attention the Sandias
- Route 66/Albuquerque Gateway theme, with signage reinforced at Tramway, Eubank and Juan Tabo.

Supporting elements included:

- Southwestern Shops
- Outdoor cafés
- Restaurants
- Curio Shops
- Kiche diners and shopping [
- Neon signs
- Upper end art galleries
- Tourist Shops
- Visitor's Center, for stopovers and a tourist meeting point

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