

## SAWMILL/WELLS PARK DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

*"Disrespectful, unloving change, which is not a part of a process of continuing transformation but an abrupt disconnection with the past, destroys local character and identity."*

*---A City at the End of the World, V.B. Price,  
University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1992.*

*"Character is what gives a community its identity. It is part imagery, part memory and gathered time, part attitude. Character is found in whatever gives resonance to a place; whatever references the way life has been, and is lived there; whatever identifies the community, its history, its resources. Because character is expressed in so many small and large things, it is very vulnerable to change. Change is part of the life of a community. It can't be stopped, and shouldn't be. But the scale of change can be controlled and the kinds of change can be influenced."*

*---Preserving Community Character: Ways to  
Reconcile Change with the Character of a Place, New  
Hampshire Association of Historic District  
Commissions, 1988.*

## THE IMPORTANCE OF AREA HISTORY

Historic roads, platting, and buildings give Sawmill/Wells Park its strong physical character. The following broad historical outline and list of historic buildings help explain existing area appearance and function. The sector plan's action plans, public design policies, and zoning are written to help property owners, residents, business owners, potential developers and public agencies conserve the community's historic characteristics as the area is reshaped to respond to new issues and opportunities.

Sawmill/Wells Park has been shaped by over 200 years of history. The five historic periods described on the following pages illustrate how local, national and international events influenced the area's growth. The maps show that much of Sawmill/Wells Park's distinctive physical character comes from remaining roads, platting, and buildings predating World War II. The maps also show incompatible land uses developed in different eras with radically different development priorities.

### A BRIEF HISTORY

The earliest permanent settlements in the Old Town area were made by Tiwa speaking people about 1350 A.D. The Tiwa lived near the Rio Grande between what are now the town of Bernalillo and Isleta Pueblo. Spaniards later called this area the Province of Tiguex. Tiwa farmers grew corn, beans, squash and cotton in irrigated fields. Five historic periods followed starting with Old Town settlement in 1706. (See pp. 6 and 7.)

In the 1800s, houses were built along the irrigation ditches and major roads that are now called Mountain Road, Sawmill Road and Rio Grande Boulevard. In 1903, the original sawmill, the American Lumber Company, and its railroad spur were surrounded by farm land and swamps.

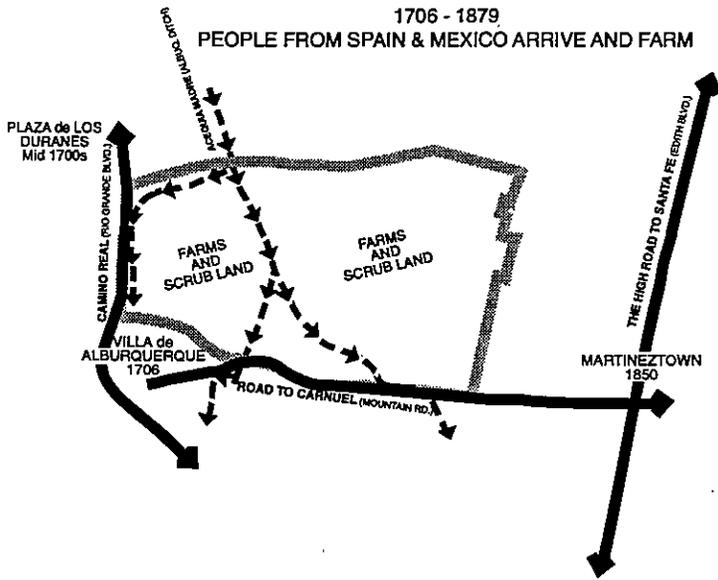
Most of the area's major housing subdivisions were built in the 1920s during a post World War I building boom. The 1920s development contributes strongly to the existing human scale of the neighborhoods: quiet residential streets lined with small lots, small single story houses and duplexes that are predominantly pitched-roofed and have windows and doors facing the street, small front yards, and unobtrusive garages, carports, and parking areas that do not dominate the street. Street pavement is generally 32 feet wide. In Wells Park (between Fourth and Twelfth Streets) planting strips are located between the street curb and sidewalk. A few trees remain from the many that once arched over and shaded local streets.

Farmland buffered housing from the lumber company's sawmill activity until the 1940s. When Twelfth Street was extended north of Sawmill/Bellamah Road, the lumber company moved all of its operations west of the new street section. Eventually the lumber company operations bordered the John Baron Burg Neighborhood to the west and the West Sawmill Neighborhood to the south.

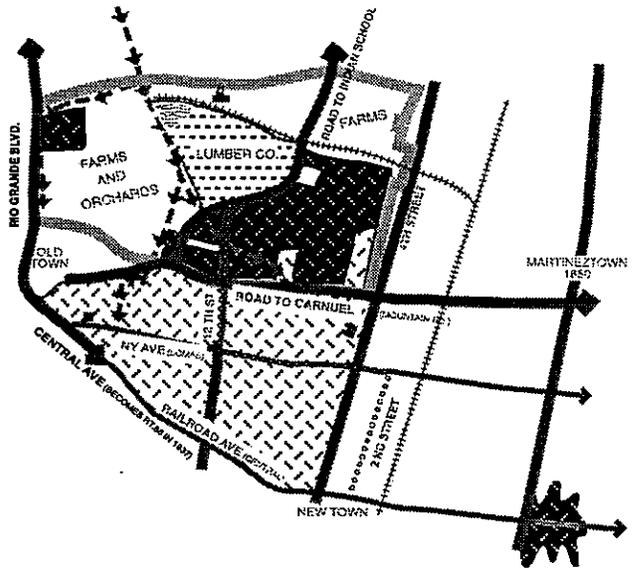
Both housing and industrial businesses replaced farmland between Fourth and Twelfth Streets, bringing the two uses even closer together. In the 1960s, Interstate 40 cut through housing areas, sandwiching subdivision remnants between the highway and expanding industrial areas to the south.

In the 1950s, Old Town began to commercialize. Its influence spread north and east in the 1970s and 1980s with restaurants, the Sheraton Old Town Hotel, the Albuquerque Museum, and the New Mexico Natural History Museum. The expansion continues today with the coming Exploral Science Center and commercial development just north of Old Town.

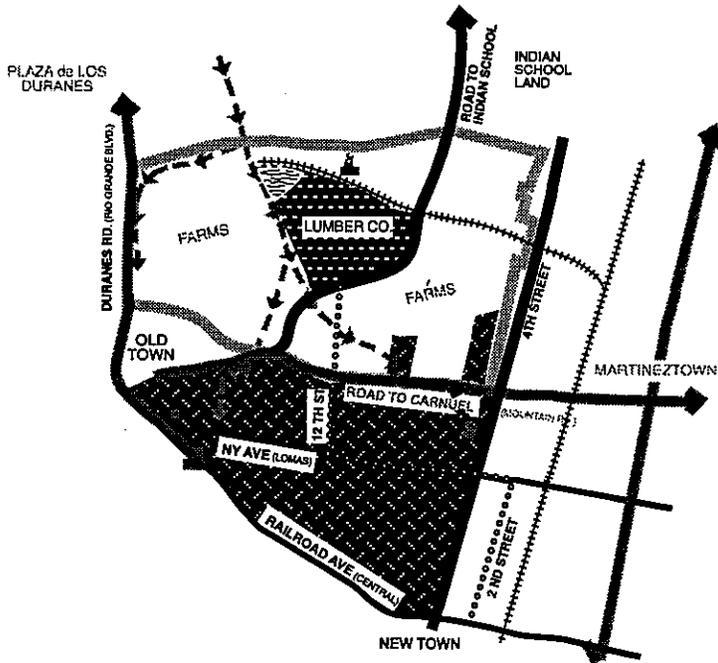
1706 - 1879  
PEOPLE FROM SPAIN & MEXICO ARRIVE AND FARM



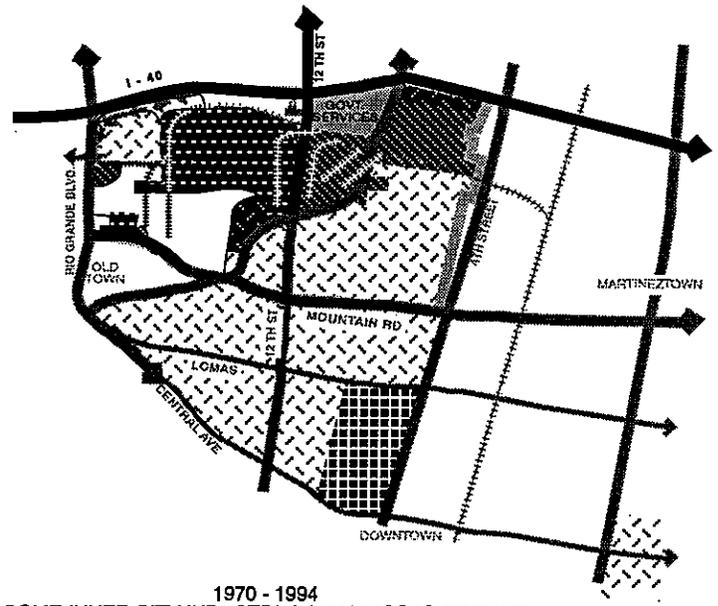
1920 - 1944  
RESIDENTIAL SUBDIVISIONS EXPAND AFTER WWI



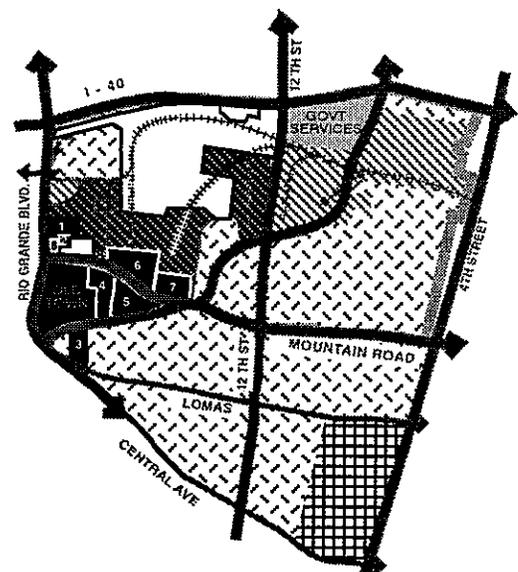
1880 - 1919  
THE RAILROAD AND THE SAWMILL DEVELOP



1945 - 1969  
INDUSTRIAL BUSINESSES GROW AND THE STREET SYSTEM DEVELOPS



1970 - 1994  
SOME INNER CITY INDUSTRIAL BUSINESSES DECLINE  
OLD TOWN EXPANDS, AND MUSEUMS ARE BUILT



Legend:

- Sawmill Sector Development Plan Area Boundaries
- Acequia
- County Court House
- Mill Pond
- Streetcar
- Power Plant
- New Railroad Spurs
- Existing Railroad Spurs
- New Subdivisions
- Old Subdivisions
- New Lumber Co. & Other Lumber Yards
- Existing Lumber Yards
- Vacant Land
- New Warehouses/Factories Etc.
- Existing Warehouses/Factories Etc.
- New Downtown Development
- Existing Downtown Development

1. Sheraton Hotel
2. Children's Museum
3. Old Town Continues to Commercialize
4. Albuquerque Museum
5. Tiguex Park
6. Natural History Museum
7. Proposed Explorer Museum
8. Restaurants/Retail Shops

**1706** Villa de Albuquerque (Old Town) founded

El Camino Real continues through the Villa de Albuquerque as the established route to Old Mexico

**1819** Town of Carnuel established in Tijeras Canyon Mountain Road becomes the route from Old Town to Carnuel

**Nineteenth century** People living in Old Town, farm land in what will become the Sawmill/Wells Park area and eventually build homes near their fields

**1880** The railroad arrives approximately one and one half miles east of what is now Historic Old Town

Farmland is expanded by newcomers from Europe and the eastern United States

New Town develops around Railroad Avenue (Central) west of the tracks

The Villa de Albuquerque (Old Town) loses businesses to New Town

**1882** Land donated to build the Indian School

Road from Old Town to the Indian School is established

**1898** Area is primarily used for farming and buildings are mainly along Mountain Road and irrigation ditches

Residential subdivisions spread out from New Town

**1884 and 1905** Two subdivisions established just north of Mountain Road

Small scale commercial establishments are built among the homes and farms along Mountain Road

**1903** 110 acres are donated to develop the American Lumber Company (1903-1917) Becomes McKinley Land and Lumber Company (1917-1924)

Santa Fe Railway Company builds a rail spur from the main line to serve the lumber company

People flock to the area for jobs

Streetcar extended from New Town to serve Sawmill workers and stores open to serve sawmill workers:

Tomas Duran house and store built on SE corner of Twelfth Street and Sawmill Road (the end of the streetcar line at the sawmill's main gate)

Cesario Gonzales home, saloon and dance hall built on Sawmill Road east of Twelfth Street (Saloon becomes grocery during prohibition)

**1904** Prager Electric Power Station built - uses wood scrap for fuel

Old Town remains a mixture of homes and neighborhood stores

**1923-45** Land subdivided and developed for housing near Rio Grande Boulevard and in the area between the road to the Indian School and Fifth Street

Residential subdivisions also expand east and west along Central Avenue

**1924** Lumber Company renamed George E. Breece Lumber Company

**1927** Streetcar discontinued

**1937** Central Avenue becomes part of Route 66

**1942** Lumber company ownership changes

Remnants of farmland east of Twelfth Street subdivided for housing

Twelfth Street expanded north through the Lumber Company property

Lumber Company sizes down (all operations move west of Twelfth Street)

Industrial businesses replace farmland east of Twelfth Street and land vacated by the lumber company

As farmland sells, neighborhoods and industries develop close together

More railroad spurs are built to serve businesses

Old Town begins to commercialize:

**1951** Predominantly residential, 30 shops, 4 restaurants

**1958** Historic Zone established

**1964** 65 shops and 6 restaurants mainly around the plaza

**1959** Zoning established city-wide

**mid-1960's** I-40 built Downtown declines as Uptown grows

**1969** Acequia Madre (Albuquerque Ditch) vacated south of Zearing

The city continues to expand east and north

Old Town continues to commercialize:

**1972** 85 shops and 8 restaurants

**1980** 104 shops and 10 restaurants

**1975** Tiguex Park built

**late-1970s** Sheraton Hotel built

**1979** Albuquerque Museum opens on former truck terminal site

**mid-1980s** New Mexico State Natural History Museum built

**late-1980s** REI, a National Outdoor sporting goods outlet, replaces Keebler Cookie Company on Mountain Road

**late-1980s** Duke City Lumber Company vacates 35 acres of land; PNM Prager Station site and other industrial properties found to be polluted

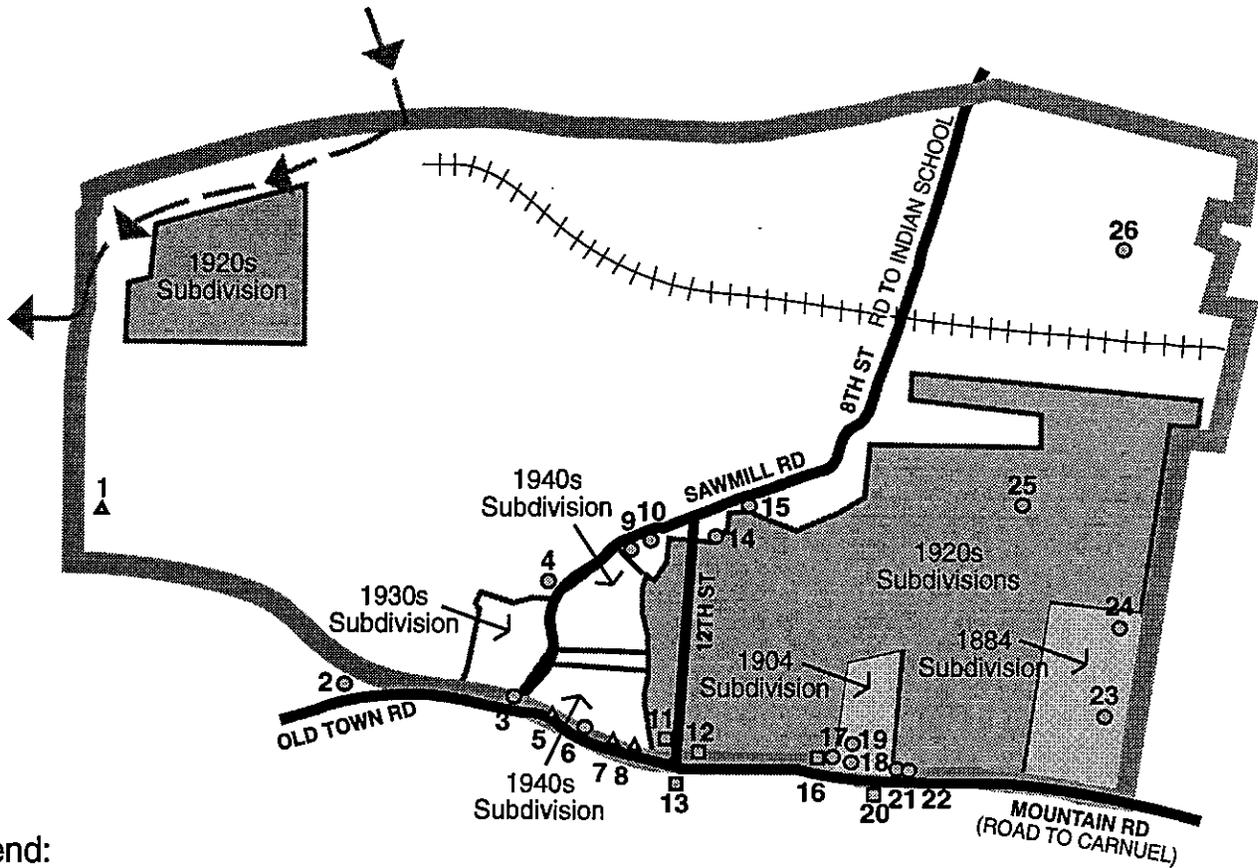
**early-1990s** Childrens' Museum opens in Sheraton Mercado

**1993** PNM-owned land on Mountain Road sold and transferred to the City to build the Exploral Science Center

**1994** Shops built on north side of Mountain Road west of Twentieth Street

## PRE-WWII BUILDINGS, ROADS AND DITCHES

The following map shows existing buildings, roads and ditches that predate World War II. Buildings numbered on this page are described on the next two pages.



### Legend:

- Sawmill Sector Development Plan Area Boundaries
- Remnant of Albuquerque Ditch (Acequia Madre)
- 1903 Railroad Spur
- Old Buildings
  - 1706 - 1879
  - 1880 - 1919
  - 1920 - 1945 (Most of Sawmill/ Wells Park housing is from this era - individual buildings are not called out except on Mountain Road.)
- Portions of Road to Carnuel and Road to the Indian School

## SOME OF THE OLD BUILDINGS IN SAWMILL/WELLS PARK AND ALONG MOUNTAIN ROAD

The following numbers are keyed to the map on the previous page.

1706 - 1879

1880-1919

1880-1919  
continued

1. **Salvador Armijo House, 618 Rio Grande Blvd. NW (1840s, remodelled late Nineteenth century)** Salvador Armijo was a member of one of the most influential and powerful families in New Mexico.

5. **901 Fourteenth St. NW (southern rooms built in the 1870s)** The old rooms were reportedly once used as a stable for a brewery.

7. **1301 Mountain Rd. NW (circa 1865)** This house belonged to Catherine Apodaca in 1898. It was built only 20 years after New Mexico became a U.S. territory. The porch and hipped roof were added much later.



8. **1223 Mountain Rd. NW (circa 1865)** This old adobe home still has its fine Territorial detailing.



2. **Romero House, 1617 Old Town Rd. NW (pre-1890)** Rare Territorial decorative window frames. This is one of several historic homes along this stretch of road from Old Albuquerque (Old Town) to Carnuel in Tijeras Canyon.

3. **Bardaracco's Summer Garden, 1501 Mountain Rd. NW (pre-1898)** The original building remains beneath the many exterior changes.



4. **1321 Sawmill Rd. NW (pre-1898)** This is probably an old farm house from when the area was predominantly agricultural.

6. **Stephen Balling House, 1315 Mountain Rd. NW. (1908)** Mr. Balling was the proprietor of the Iceberg Saloon at 109 Second St. SW.

9. **1324 Sawmill Rd. NW (pre-1898)** This house may have been built much earlier than 1898. Little is known of its history, but it was probably a farm house, since an acequia once ran nearby.

10. **1316 Sawmill Rd. NW (Circa 1900)** Another early house along this old road. Little is known of its history.

14. **Tomas Duran House, 1224 Twelfth St. NW (circa 1900)** Tomas Duran built this house and La Tienda de la Maquina de Rajar (the Lumber Mill Store) which stood at the corner of Twelfth and Sawmill Road. One of his daughters lived there until her death in 1994. A granddaughter and husband now live there.



15. **Gonzales Saloon and Grocery, 100 Bellamah NW (pre-1907)** The store building facing Twelfth St. was a saloon and dance hall. The building was used as a grocery during Prohibition. Buildings from the same era stand to the east along Bellamah Road.

17. **With House, 815 Mountain Rd. NW (1st floor - 1890s or earlier; 2nd floor added in 1904)** The mansard roof is very rare. The With family lived here for over 50 years.

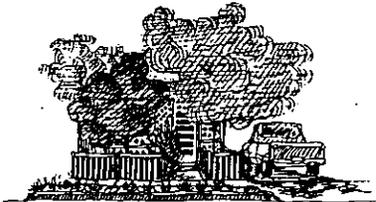


**1880 - 1919  
continued**

18. **Blythe Grocery, 1201 Eighth St. NW (pre-1908)** Little is known of this adobe store building except the name of an early owner. It may have been built to serve the 1904 John M. Moore Addition.



19. **1207 and 1211 Eighth St. NW (pre-1907)** Sawmill workers lived in these two cottages. Both cottages used to have delicate wood trim in their front gables.



21. **707 Mountain Rd. NW (building date unknown)** The shape and building material of this small house is very rare in the City. It may be a turn of the century building. Perhaps it was moved in from Madrid, New Mexico.



**1880 - 1919  
continued**

22. **705 Mountain Rd. NW (pre-1898)** This old adobe may date back well into the nineteenth century. The Atencio family have owned it for over 50 years.
23. **1211 Fifth St. (1898-1907)** This was one of the first houses in the Romero Addition which was platted in 1884.



24. **1401 Fifth St. NW (pre-1900)** According to the owner, this house was built by a railroad employee. Its barn (now remodelled) stood to the west.



25. **Isaac DeLong House, 618 Bellamah NW (1918)** This house once stood alone. The street it faced was named Taft rather than Bellamah. Its first owner was a railroad engineer.

26. **Bezemek barn, 2017 Fifth St. NW (date unknown)** Neighbors identified this building as the last remnant of the Bezemek farm which occupied the land west of Fourth Street between McKnight and the railroad spur. Bezemek raised Jersey cows here in 1913.

**1920 - 1945**

11. **The Navajo Addition, platted in 1925.** The homes from Mountain Road to 1103 Twelfth Street on the west side of Twelfth Street are unlike any others in Albuquerque. Their small size, flat roofs (except for one recent pitched roof remodelling), tiny front yards, identical setback, and individualized detailing combine to make an architecturally unusual block.



12. **Gardner's Service Station, 1000 Twelfth St. NW (1932)** This old station has lost its car drive-through canopy, but its location indicates the importance of 12th and Mountain as well-travelled automobile routes.

13. **Sunshine Market, 912 Twelfth St. NW (late 1920s)** This small store is the only one still operating of the several which once served the Sawmill/Wells Park area.

16. **With Grocery Store, 819 Mountain Rd. NW (1921)** This little corner store with its mission style parapet was probably the oldest grocery store in the city when it closed in the early 1980's.

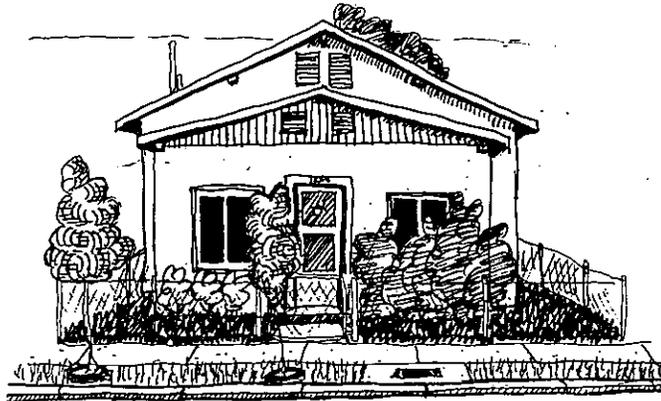
20. **Mountain Road Station, 724 Mountain Rd. NW (1931)** This cottage style station was built by Jose C. Pino who lived next door. It is one of the oldest gas stations of this style in Albuquerque.

**OTHER 1920s BUNGALOWS  
CHARACTERISTIC OF  
MUCH OF THE AREA**

714 Summer St. NW



1228 7th St. NW



1013 11th St. NW



## COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

*"...A neighborhood becomes a community if the people in it talk together, work together, respect one another....When neighborhood people become community...a neighbor...is someone with whom one owns the neighborhood."*

*"If the neighborhood does not define its own problems, someone else may define them inappropriately."*

*---Partners: Neighborhood Revitalization Through Partnership and A Minneapolis Case Study, Dayton Hudson Foundation, 1981.*





## **COMMUNITY STRENGTHS**

The plan's proposed policies, regulations, projects and programs flow from the area's many strengths. Building on these strengths should create a strong community of businesses, institutions, and residents. The most important Sawmill/Wells Park assets are the people who live, work and do business there:

- Residents and Business Owners interested in improving the area
- Over 2000 employees
- Staff from area museums and the Wells Park Community Center
- Active community organizations and local service providers:
  - Sawmill Advisory Council
  - Wells Park Neighborhood Association
  - Neighborhood Housing Services

### **A PARTIAL LIST OF COMMUNITY STRENGTHS FOLLOWS:**

#### **THE AREA IS PHYSICALLY INTERESTING.**

- Distinctive platting, buildings and streets from the past (See Area History, pp.5 - 11)
- Potential landscaping areas between street curbs and sidewalks and on large street medians south of I-40 on Twelfth Street and Fifth Street

#### **THE CITY AND STATE ARE MAKING PUBLIC INVESTMENTS IN THE AREA.**

- Drainage project, sidewalk installation, and street paving for the John Baron Burg Park Addition completed in 1992
- Wells Park Community Center grounds renovation completed in 1994
- New neighborhood gateway park at Zearing and Rio Grande Boulevard completed in 1994
- Ongoing investment in local streets, sidewalks, drainage, etc.
- Proposed Wells Park Community Center renovation
- City in the process of acquiring 27+ acres of vacant industrial land to assist redevelopment for housing, trail, park, and economic development

#### **THE AREA IS CONVENIENTLY LOCATED FOR BOTH RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES.**

- Housing and business areas within walking distance of Old Town, Downtown, and three major north/south bus routes
- Businesses close to Interstate Highway 40
- Railroad spurs for businesses and some railway right-of-way for possible conversion to trails or other public uses

#### **EDUCATIONAL AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ARE CLOSE BY AND ACCESSIBLE.**

- Old Town
- Museums (New Mexico Natural History Museum, Albuquerque Museum, Exploral Science Center, Children's Museum)
- Trail Corridor along the Rio Grande
- Wells Park Community Center
- Local artists and artisans who teach their skills to young people

## **EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES ARE PLENTIFUL**

- Over 100 industrial and commercial businesses in the plan area
- Vacant land and buildings for new business development

## **THE COMMUNITY HAS INITIATED SEVERAL INNOVATIVE PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS.**

- The Sawmill Advisory Council, a nonprofit organization made up of local residents, has been successfully informing the community about and combatting pollution in the area over several years.
- A Wells Park resident wrote a grant and coordinated efforts with Wells Park Community Center staff to initiate a youth conflict mediation pilot program. The program ended, but may serve as a model for other neighborhoods.
- The Wells Park Neighborhood Association applied for a grant and started a tree planting program in 1992. Many trees were planted in front yards and are thriving.
- The Sawmill Advisory Council applied for grants and started an after-school tutoring program in spring 1993.
- In the summer of 1993, the Sawmill Advisory Council began managing mural projects. Thirty children worked with Leo Romero, a local artist, to paint murals at Twelfth Street and Sawmill Road. A mural is being planned for a warehouse wall at Zearing and Rio Grande Boulevard and another is being planned for the neighborhood gateway park recently built by the City at the same location.
- The Wells Park Neighborhood started a Beautification Program with donations from Sunwest and Norwest banks. Volunteers use the money to help landscape homes with drought resistant plants. Homeowners then volunteer to help their neighbors landscape.
- Neighborhood Housing Services, Wells Park Community Center, and the Wells Park Neighborhood Association initiated a "spruce-up" program. Teenagers paint, clean and do minor home repairs for seniors on fixed incomes.
- Neighborhood Housing Services, a nonprofit organization serving the Downtown, Sawmill, and Wells Park neighborhoods, concentrated its housing rehabilitation loans in the Sawmill/Wells Park area in the early 1990s, helping to rehabilitate about 50 houses in four years.
- The Sawmill Advisory Council formed a separate nonprofit organization. Working with Neighborhood Housing Services, they obtained funds to buy land and develop seven affordable houses for low to middle income families on vacant lots in the Sawmill and Wells Park neighborhoods.
- Sawmill Advisory Council and Wells Park Neighborhood Association publish and distribute newsletters that feature interviews about local history.

## COMMUNITY ISSUES

The following issues either have already had a negative effect on the community or could threaten the community if appropriate steps are not taken.

1. Deterioration of the community's physical appearance and character
2. Environmental degradation
3. Unemployment, under-employment and insufficient household incomes to maintain properties, to pay escalating property taxes, and to buy or improve homes
4. Insufficient visible public investment
5. Insufficient public recreational opportunities for adults and children
6. Incompatible land uses  
Encroachment of intense land uses on residential areas  
Isolated neighborhoods surrounded by regional services or manufacturing
7. Insufficient neighborhood commercial services

The Sector Plan's action plans, public project design policies, and zoning regulations address these concerns. The following proposals are consistent with policies in all other plans and ordinances affecting the plan area: The Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan, the Rio Grande Boulevard Corridor Plan as it relates to properties abutting Rio Grande Boulevard, and Historic H-1 Zone regulations as they relate to properties within the Historic Old Town Buffer Zone.