



Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan 2012

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1. Why do we need a sector development plan for this area?

Currently, properties within Volcano Heights are zoned RD – residential developing area – which allows only residential development, including single-family housing and townhouses. Because the West Side is disproportionately residential development served by relatively few arterial roads, the land use and transportation pattern that exists today is anticipated to create significant traffic congestion on the West Side in the future, particularly on the limited river crossings available, since most residents commute to the majority of jobs East of the river. Partly because of its location surrounding the intersection of two vital regional roads – Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard – Volcano Heights presents an opportunity to introduce an employment and commercial center that can serve more residents on the West Side and help minimize traffic congestion over time. In addition, the checkerboard property ownership and lack of infrastructure argue for a plan that can help coordinate development across property lines, along corridors, and over time.

2. Who has been leading this process?

There have been several efforts to plan for Volcano Heights. This latest effort has been predominantly City-led, with significant collaboration at key points with property owners, neighbors, Open Space advocates, and Petroglyph National Monument representatives. The City planning team has also worked collaboratively with staff from, the Mid-Region Council of Governments, City Department of Municipal Development, City ABQ Ride, City Parks and Recreation, and City Open Space Division. The tremendous amount of time and effort of participants from past planning attempts has laid the groundwork for the current draft and set the direction for the latest approaches to many of the key issues identified during the past 8 years.

3. How is this Plan different from past efforts?

- *The 2006 Volcano Heights Plan contained the areas now referred to as Volcano Mesa, now made up of Volcano Cliffs, Volcano Trails, and Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan areas. Within Volcano Heights area, it proposed a smaller Town Center surrounded by a significant amount of office uses in campus-like settings.*
- *The 2010 Volcano Heights Plan proposed a much larger Town Center, surrounded by either office campus zone or multi-family residential zone. The 2010 Plan also proposed minimum 2-story building heights and required parking structures that were determined to pose a potential deterrent to development in the short-term.*
- *The 2012 Draft Plan proposes a Town Center between the previous proposals in size, much less office uses, and a higher proportion of multifamily residential yet fewer overall new residents. The development vision has been adjusted to the downturn in the economic market to estimate 2 million square feet of retail and office space and 5,500 jobs at full build-out, compared to the previous efforts that envisioned 5 million square feet of office and retail and almost 20,000 new jobs.*

4. What “compromise” does this Plan represent?

This Plan seeks to balance the goal of creating a Major Activity Center with a walkable, urban environment with the goal of protecting, preserving, and celebrating the unique physical, cultural, geological, and archaeological environment that exists today. The Plan recognizes private property rights and offers tremendous entitlements and flexibility of future development in exchange for detailed standards for site development, building design, and open space and landscaping. The Plan’s innovative bonus height system is an attempt to provide incentives that encourage both dense, high-quality built environments and the preservation of rock outcroppings, open space, and views.

5. What does this Plan have to offer the West Side and the City as a whole?

The Volcano Mesa Amendment to the Rank II West Side Strategic Plan recommended that Volcano Heights become a Major Activity Center, with a focus on employment. The Plan is designed to achieve this vision through zoning that allows a fine-grained mix of uses in order to create a walkable, urban environment. The Plan’s proposed street grid, small block sizes, and design controls are intended to create high-quality development with a unique sense of place and additional shopping and living choices in a part of the city with largely suburban single-family residential and “big-box” retail development. By meeting some of the employment, shopping, service and entertainment needs locally, the Plan aims to help ease traffic congestion problems caused by West Side residents crossing the river for these amenities.

6. How does this Plan affect my ability to develop my property?

The Plan’s proposed zoning provides more flexibility for potential development options and offers a streamlined development process to help developments get underway. Significant coordination of infrastructure is required with nearby property owners, which is to be expected in an undeveloped area. The details for mandatory road construction are meant to provide predictability for those ready to develop as well as the properties along the same corridors to ensure quality and compatibility over time.

7. What happens to my property?

The Plan proposes to change the zoning of all property within Volcano Heights to provide many more entitlements and more flexibility of uses and possible development, density, and heights. The Plan includes height, setback, and other site development standards much like standard zoning does, and it also includes customized building design standards meant to ensure high-quality development. As in any undeveloped area, property owners are required to construct infrastructure when they develop. The Plan requires mandatory roads to create the backbone transportation grid in this area as well as non –mandatory, local roads to serve individual development projects.

For property owners outside the Plan boundary but nearby, the Plan does increase heights, density, and range of uses allowed compared to the RD zoning the property has currently. At the same time, the increased range of uses are intended to provide opportunities for retail and services that can serve nearby residents and ease congestion pressure on regional roads over time.

8. How does this Plan protect the investment I have made into my home?

- *The land within Volcano Heights is private property with entitlements and has the right to develop any time. Instead of the single-family and townhouse development allowed under the current zoning, which would aggravate the existing problem of congested roads particularly during peak commuting hours, the Plan seeks to encourage a different type of development: an urban, walkable environment, with a wide range of uses and higher-density residential in easy walking and biking distance of transit, retail, services, and open space.*
- *While the Plan introduces a bonus height system that would allow heights above those currently allowed by the Northwest Mesa Escarpment Plan within some zones, in exchange it requires improvements to both the built and natural environments in order to assure more public spaces, open space, and publicly accessible amenities.*
- *The Plan seeks to protect existing single-family residences through the Neighborhood Transition zones, where heights and scale are limited to match existing development.*
- *The Plan seeks to protect the Petroglyph National Monument through an Escarpment Transition zone, where heights and scale are limited to minimize the impact on sensitive lands.*

9. How soon would development happen?

- *Currently, the land within Volcano Heights is private property with entitlements and has the right to develop any time. The Plan's adoption will change zoning on property within Volcano Heights, and entitlements would be in place allowing development at any time. The Plan does not include any limits on development timing or phasing. Instead, the Plan focuses on coordinating high-quality development over time through mandatory roads, frontage requirements, and site development and building design standards.*
- *Because there are no utilities or infrastructure in the Plan area, development can be expected to be phased in over time as infrastructure is extended to this area. Properties nearest to existing utilities can be expected to develop first. Properties along Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard, along which utilities could be extended relatively easily, can also be expected to develop within the next five years, particularly as these roads provide high visibility to development and high daily traffic counts.*
- *The full build-out of Volcano Heights could take years to decades. The vision included in the Plan extends to the year 2035.*

10. How does this Plan's zoning differ from the City Zoning Code?

Like the City Zoning Code, the SU-2 zones proposed by this Plan include a list of uses allowed, limits on heights and setbacks, landscaping regulations, etc. Instead of separating land uses as the Zoning Code typically does, which results in much more auto-dependent development, this Plan allows a wide range of uses to be mixed. In order to assure compatibility, the Plan takes a more detailed approach toward the site development standards and building design requirements along corridors and within zones. The Plan also attempts to better coordinate land use with transportation by matching the desired character of development with attractive streetscapes that support the land uses envisioned. Where the City Zoning Code typically produces a suburban-style environment highly dependent on the automobile, this Plan attempts to create a more urban environment that encourages a mix of uses in easy walking and bicycling distance that can also help to support transit use over time. The Plan's zoning approach is customized to balance the goal of creating a Major Activity Center over time with the responsibility to respect and

protect the unique environment, natural resources, and sensitive lands that offer an invaluable benefit to the City and its residents.

11. How will views be protected?

- *The mandatory street network is oriented to provide east-west view corridors to highlight the Sandia Mountains, the escarpment and the Rio Grande Valley. The Park Edge road on the Plan's eastern boundary is designed as a single-loaded road as much as possible to preserve a permanent public viewshed to the Petroglyph National Monument.*
- *Allowed heights in the Plan area are stepped down toward the escarpment to the East to preserve views to the Sandia Mountains. In general, the Plan retains the maximum allowable heights by right limited by the Northwest Mesa Escarpment Plan – 40 feet – for Town Center and Regional Center toward the center of the Plan area, while capping heights in the other zones to 26 feet or less. While the Plan does include a bonus height system that allows heights beyond 40 feet, this benefit is limited to zones toward the center of the Plan area away from the escarpment and requires benefits to the natural and built environment in exchange for additional height.*
- *Western views from east of the escarpment will be preserved by limiting structure height on properties abutting or adjacent to the escarpment and/or Petroglyph National Monument boundary. The 15-foot limit on development within the Impact Area defined by the Rank III Northwest Mesa Escarpment Plan along the escarpment edge is retained in this Plan, as are the color restrictions. Finally, the Plan requires low-reflective value glass to minimize reflectivity.*
- *The Plan requires both usable open space onsite and detached open space offsite to encourage the preservation of basalt rock outcroppings and viewsheds throughout the Plan Area. The bonus height system includes incentives for open space and view preservation.*

12. How are building heights addressed?

Structure heights are set by Site Development Standards for each zone and are most restrictive along transitions between the Plan area's expected higher-density mixed-use development and existing single-family residential neighborhoods on the north and south and abutting the Park Edge Street on the eastern edge of the Plan Area and in the Impact Area designated by the Rank III Northwest Mesa Escarpment Plan. Structure heights in the denser parts of the Plan Area, generally located in its core, will have higher maximum heights. These maximums may be exceeded by developers who meet certain criteria aimed at providing walkable, desirable urban spaces and preservation of natural features. The maximum bonus height of any structure in the Volcano Heights area would be in the Town Center and is allowed up to 75 feet, approximately 4-5 stories.

13. What is a bonus height system, and why is it being proposed?

The Rank III Northwest Mesa Escarpment Plan (NWMEP) adopted in 1989 limited the maximum building heights in the Conservation Area, which includes much of Volcano Heights, to 40 feet. Within the Impact Area, a buffer strip along the Petroglyph National Monument edge, the NWMEP caps heights at 15 feet. This Plan retains the allowable height by right in Town Center and Regional Center as 40 feet and retains the 15-foot height limit in the Impact Area.

In order to achieve the goal of a Major Activity Center, with an urban, walkable environment that can support pedestrian, bicycle, and transit use in addition to auto travel,

the Plan introduces a bonus height system that allows heights beyond 40 feet in zones away from the Monument edge and existing single-family neighborhoods. In exchange for higher building heights that allow higher-density development, projects must demonstrate commensurate benefits to both the built and natural environments. The purpose of the bonus height system is to give incentives to developers for protecting and preserving rock outcroppings and open space, providing high-quality public and civic spaces, and incorporating sustainable development design.

14. What will be done to provide additional open space?

- *The Plan requires both usable open space onsite and detached open space offsite to encourage the preservation of basalt rock outcroppings and other private and publicly-owned open space throughout the Plan Area. These regulations have been calibrated based on two development scenarios – predominantly residential or non-residential – to result in enough open space to preserve the significant rock outcroppings plus a 100-foot buffer throughout the Plan area.*
- *The Plan’s bonus height system offers incentives for dedicating or preserving rock outcroppings and open space; constructing parks, community gardens, and/or public outdoor spaces; and preserving viewsheds.*
- *The Plan recommends that open space be prioritized for acquisition through purchase or trade, particularly for significant rock outcroppings, the archaeologically significant playa area, and other sensitive lands.*

15. How does the Plan address the Petroglyph National Monument?

- *Per the request of the National Park Service that manages the Petroglyph National Monument and City Open Space Division that owns much of the land, the Park Edge street on the Plan’s eastern boundary is designed as a single-loaded road as much as possible to minimize impacts on sensitive lands within the Monument, provide visibility that encourages safety, and preserve views that are preserved in perpetuity.*
- *Access to the Petroglyph National Monument will still be controlled via a boundary fence that allows entry only at specified locations.*
- *Heights within the Impact Area along the Monument boundary are capped at 15 feet per the regulations in the Northwest Mesa Escarpment Plan.*
- *The Escarpment Transition Zone limits heights, density, and intensity of use to minimize negative impacts on the Monument. This zone does allow a mix of residential and non-residential uses to broaden the range of compatible services and amenities that could add to the use and enjoyment of visitors to the Monument.*

16. What is a rock outcropping, why should they be protected, and what does the Plan propose to protect them?

A rock outcropping is volcanic rock formation above the surface of the surrounding land. The Plan area includes numerous basalt rock outcroppings with cultural, archeological, and geological significance in a landscape unique in the City and rare in the world. The Plan provides both regulations and incentives to preserve and protect these and other natural features as either public or private open space and as part of view corridors. For the purposes of this plan, a rock outcropping is defined as bedrock or other stratum a minimum of six feet high and in excess of 500 square feet in surface area.

17. What is a Major Activity Center, and why is its designation important?

- *The Volcano Mesa Amendment to the Rank II West Side Strategic Plan recommended that Volcano Heights be designated a Major Activity Center, which includes a focus on employment, retail, services, and higher-density residential development in an urban, walkable environment. Volcano Heights will not officially become a designated Major Activity Center until the City's Rank I Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan's Center and Corridors Map is updated. While the City does intend to update this map, it is unknown at this time when that step will be taken.*
- *The area's designation as a Major Activity Center provides the opportunity for this undeveloped tract of land located at the intersection of two major roadways to develop with a mix of employment, retail, and services to meet the needs of the wider West Side area, support public transit, and help address the jobs-housing imbalance expected to worsen traffic congestion over time, particularly on the region's limited river crossings.*
- *As a designated Major Activity Center, the City can prioritize efforts to help with business recruitment and economic development and coordinating major infrastructure and development efforts.*

18. How does the Plan propose to streamline development, and why is that important?

- *The Plan is intended to codify upfront the regulations that protect existing neighborhoods over time, therefore requiring less public input for each development project later. This allows predictability for development as it phases in over time as well as assurance to existing neighborhoods and future residents that new development will be high-quality and pose minimal negative impacts.*
- *Projects that require significant infrastructure coordination (roads, utilities, etc.) can go either through City Council's TIDD, SAD, or PID process (recommended for large areas of development with multiple property owners) OR through the Development Review Board (DRB) for a Site Plan for Subdivision. After either step, projects may go directly to building permit depending on their size and zone location. Where there is potential for more impact to surrounding neighborhoods, more public notice is required.*
- *Provided that infrastructure coordination and financing are in place, Site Development Plans for Building Permit that comply with all standards of the Plan, either fully or with minor deviations, will be processed administratively by the Planning Director or his/her designee and proceed directly to Building Permit. Only submittals requesting a major deviation from the Plan's regulations will be required to go to the Environmental Planning Commission.*
- *The Plan introduces an optional Volcano Heights Review Team made up of City and agency staff and other stakeholders who can work outside of a judicial process to address challenges and collaborate on solutions to allow developments that meet the goals and intent of this Plan, even when particular Plan regulations or City procedures may pose issues. The Planning Director would assemble a relevant Review Team for each particular challenge. Over time, the members of this Review Team would become familiar with the Plan, its regulations, its intent, and its weaknesses and would best be able to work creatively and efficiently to remove obstacles to high-quality development projects.*
- *The Plan recommends that staff be assigned to assist developers throughout the approval process.*

19. What is the VHRT (Review Team), and why is it being proposed?

As one method to streamline development, the Plan proposes an optional Volcano Heights Review Team, loosely modeled on the Uptown Review Team for the Uptown Major Activity Center. Made up of City and agency staff and other stakeholders, the VHRT would work outside of a judicial process to address challenges and collaborate on solutions to allow developments that meet the goals and intent of this Plan, even when particular Plan regulations or City procedures may pose development issues. At his or her discretion, the Planning Director would assemble a relevant Review Team for each particular challenge. Over time, the members of this Review Team would become familiar with the Plan, its regulations, its intent, and its weaknesses and would best be able to work creatively and efficiently to remove obstacles to high-quality development projects.

While the Planning Director would have the discretion to invite neighborhood associations and/or merchant associations to work on the Review Team to review a particular project proposal, the intent of the Plan is that neighborhood interests are already codified in the Plan's regulations, standards, and policies, therefore requiring less public input for each development project later. This allows predictability for development as it phases in over time as well as assurance to existing neighborhoods and future residents that new development will be high-quality and pose minimal negative impacts.

20. Will “big box” development be allowed in Volcano Heights?

Yes, large retailers would be allowed within zones that are not along the Petroglyph National Monument edge or next to existing single-family neighborhoods. The Regional Center Zone lining Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard is particularly suited to more auto-oriented uses, and site development standards and building design standards have been calibrated to more easily accommodate large retailers. In the Town Center and Mixed Use Zones, site development standards and building design standards would limit the appearance, size, and scale of such uses to match the desired character of surrounding development. In particular, buildings would be pulled to the street, with parking toward the side or rear and screened from the most pedestrian-oriented streets.

21. What will the traffic impacts of the proposed development be?

- *The traffic assessment conducted to analyze the anticipated impacts to local and regional traffic is included in this Plan as Appendix C.*
- *The assessment seemed to indicate that while the proposed urban, mixed-use, walkable development would increase overall traffic in the area, traffic during peak commuting hours would actually decrease, since area residents would be served with jobs, retail, and services in closer proximity, and the walkability of the proposed development pattern would encourage and support more pedestrian, bicycle, and transit trips.*
- *The additional intersections proposed along Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard, coupled with the grid proposed by the Mandatory Road network can help to regulate traffic flow, minimize congestion points, and add redundancy into the traffic network that helps disperse traffic.*

22. What is a mandatory street, and why are they being proposed?

Mandatory Streets comprise the minimal network of streets that form the backbone transportation grid to allow coordinated development in Volcano Heights. These streets are those mapped by the Plan. Property owners and/or developers in the Volcano Heights area are required to construct their portion of Mandatory Streets when development occurs according to the cross section for each street. Having a coordinated transportation grid helps support all development within Volcano Heights, coordinate high-quality development along corridors and across property lines, and disperse traffic as the area develops over time. The required cross sections for each mandatory street are tailored to whether the street will be multi-modal, i.e. support multiple modes of transportation such as autos, pedestrians, bicycles, and transit, or be oriented primarily toward autos.

23. Are the streets shown as mandatory the only streets in the Plan area?

No. All new development is also required to construct non-mandatory streets to serve local projects and complement the Mandatory Street grid.

24. Does the Plan provide access on Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard?

- The Sector Development Plan does not have the power to grant access on Paseo del Norte or Unser Boulevard. Both roads are designated limited-access roads by the Future Albuquerque Area Bikeways and Streets (FAABS) access-control policy. By policy, intersections on these roads are limited to a full intersection every ½ mile and a right-in, right-out intersection every ¼ mile. The current procedure for requesting access modifications depends on studying the impacts of a particular imminent project on the road network. Each project must show a benefit to the system, and even then, there is no guarantee that access will be granted.*
- This Plan does recommend additional access be granted for intersections that enable the Mandatory Street grid to best function to serve local and regional traffic, disperse traffic, and provide additional capacity and redundancy for the larger regional transportation network.*
- Because the development proposed by this Plan serves a larger regional purpose of decreasing congestion on river crossings and is highly dependent on these additional access points, the City has been working closely with MRCOG and City Department of Municipal Development (DMD) to grant access modifications recommended by the Plan contingent upon the Plan's adoption.*

25. Why doesn't the Plan propose streets in the northern part of the Plan area?

Because the limited size of the Neighborhood Transition Zone already reduces the flexibility for potential development, the Plan does not propose a mandatory street in this area. In addition, the existing streets north of the Plan boundary are largely within gated communities, limiting the opportunities to extend a street grid to the north. The Plan does encourage pedestrian connections to the north by policy and auto connections at such time in the future when opportunities arise. In particular, Phase III of the Boulders development to the north may offer an opportunity to coordinate a street extension to/from Volcano Heights.

26. Why does the Plan propose a single-loaded road against the Petroglyph National Monument boundary?

- *The Park Edge road on the Plan's eastern boundary is designed as a single-loaded road as much as possible to preserve a permanent public viewshed to the Petroglyph National Monument. Where it is single-loaded, development would only occur west of the Park Edge Road. The National Park Service, which manages the Monument, and City Open Space Division, which owns much of the land, both prefer single-loaded roads as the best transition from development to minimize impacts on sensitive lands within the Monument. Such a road provides visibility that encourages safety as well as spectacular views that are preserved in perpetuity.*
- *Research into the affect on property values of single-loaded roads next to open space or golf courses in other areas of the country as opposed to having these amenities in private backyards seems to indicate that single-loaded roads extend the higher property values to more lots because of the increased access and view benefits to a larger area.*
- *Safety on private property is also improved through the visibility of a single-loaded road as the border of the Monument. Where properties back up to open space, there is less surveillance and more opportunities for criminal activity to go unobserved.*

27. What does the Plan propose for transit service?

The Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) is currently studying the feasibility of high-capacity transit that would connect Rio Rancho to the north with Journal Center near I-25 via Paseo del Norte. One of the alternative routes included in that study matches the transit corridor proposed by this Plan. This transit boulevard in the center of the Town Center zone would provide an ideal location for a park-and-ride service in the near-term and high-capacity transit service in the long-term as development occurs. The transit boulevard connects Unser Boulevard on the north to Paseo del Norte on the south, allowing transit service to avoid the Paseo del Norte/Unser Boulevard intersection but still serve a larger service area. The Sector Development Plan does not have the power to implement or require such transit service, but the City has been working closely with MRCOG and ABQ Ride to coordinate future planning efforts.

28. Why doesn't the Plan propose or require trails?

Because all development and infrastructure will be paid for and coordinated by property owners, this Plan does not require trails. By policy, the Plan encourages the coordination of trail corridors through a TIDD, SAD, or PIDD process, since the checkerboard property ownership in the area will require trails to cross property lines. Trails will need to be maintained privately and carry liability, which will necessitate some source of private funds and coordinated management entity.

29. What about water?

Currently, the land within Volcano Heights is private property with entitlements and has the right to develop any time. The ABCWUA is tasked with providing water to contiguous development within Bernalillo County. While water availability is an open question in our region, the City, and particularly a Sector Development Plan, does not have the power to prevent development on the basis of water availability.

The Plan's proposed land-use pattern emphasizes dense development on small blocks, which does generally support efficient and sustainable water-use.

30. What about the ABCWUA policy for interconnecting water systems?

Private property owners are responsible for the cost of extending water and wastewater systems to serve new development. The ABCWUA requires a development agreement before either water or wastewater service is provided. The Plan recommends that property owners cooperate to share the cost of extending these services through a Tax Increment Development District (TIDD), Special Assessment District (SAD), or Public Improvement District (PID) process.

31. What about schools?

Currently, the land within Volcano Heights is private property with entitlements and has the right to develop any time. The Albuquerque Public School (APS) District is tasked with providing adequate schools for residents within its service area. The City, and particularly a Sector Development Plan, does not have the power to prevent development on the basis of school capacity or nearby facilities.

APS does use City plans, particularly Sector Development Plans in undeveloped areas, in its process to plan for new facilities, renovations, and busing arrangements to match student levels with school capacities.

APS owns one property in Volcano Heights smaller than it would typically require for a public school that it may use for a charter school or may sell as an investment property.

32. What about impact fees?

The Impact Fee Ordinance is going through a separate update. This Plan does not propose any changes to Impact Fees that may be imposed on new development.

The detached open space required by this Plan to help preserve open space and rock outcroppings is separate from and does not count toward impact fees that may be imposed for new parks and open space within the service area defined by the Impact Fee Ordinance. Because those impact fees will likely not go toward new parks and open space within the Plan area, the Plan requires usable open space onsite, requires some outdoor amenities on larger development projects, and provides incentives for private parks and open space preservation through the bonus height system.

33. What about drainage?

City Hydrology is currently updating City drainage standards in order to meet the federal Environmental Planning Agency requirements for water quality of runoff entering the Rio Grande. This Plan does not pose any specific drainage requirements. Water harvesting is required to supplement landscape irrigation. Permeable paving and low-impact design are encouraged through policy and the bonus height system.