

Downtown Neighborhood Area Tours – October 15, 16, and 19, 2009

Key Observations

The following is a list of the key observations gained during the neighborhood tours, as well as some follow-up action steps. It is a follow-up to the more detailed tour notes taken by the project team.

General

- 1) There are a tremendous variety of subareas within the Sector Plan area – each with their own set of character defining elements including architectural styles and history, size and massing of buildings, land use, street trees and other landscaping, pedestrian accessibility, and overall condition of buildings and public infrastructure.
- 2) Most of the Plan area is in very good condition, with some exceptions. Areas of concern are located in the southern portion of the Plan area – rundown motels and properties along Central and Tijeras Avenues; in the eastern portion of the Plan area – non-conforming parking lots, buildings in need of rehabilitation adjacent to and along Fourth Street.
- 3) Public infrastructure issues run throughout the Plan area.
- 4) Land use is primarily residential in varying densities, with commercial and office use located primarily along Fourth Street (Plan area's eastern boundary) and Central Avenue (Plan area's southern boundary) and to a lesser degree, along Mountain Road (Plan area's northern boundary) and Lomas Boulevard.
- 5) There are numerous opportunity sites and buildings that could be used for redevelopment purposes either by the public or private sectors. These sites are identified in the detailed tour notes.
- 6) Mountain Road has undergone a positive transformation with new development and rehabilitation of existing buildings. There are a good mix of neighborhood commercial and residential land uses along Mountain Road, particularly east of 12th Street. Some of these small businesses are struggling and some have gone out of business. Opportunity for redevelopment exists west of 12th Street, which has been identified in the tour notes.
- 7) Much of the properties zoned for townhomes, primarily north of Lomas Boulevard, have not been utilized as such. Some of the townhome development has been designed well and fits within the neighborhood, while some projects don't fit from a height and massing standpoint.
- 8) Many of the properties zoned for RC (residential / commercial) and MRO (mixed residential office) and have office uses do not appear to be in compliance with the Zone Code, which requires a 50/50 split between the two land uses (100% residential is permitted, but non-residential can be no more than 50%). These are primarily located along Lomas Boulevard and in the eastern portion of the Plan area, north of Lomas Boulevard.
- 9) There is a disconnect between the existing land use, predominantly single family homes in the historic districts, and the zoning. This is of special concern in those districts that are not regulated by the LUCC because it could be seen as an economic incentive to demolish existing structures and rebuild at higher densities. In the historic districts regulated by the LUCC that the LUCC design standards for the district are different from the zoning regulations.

- 10) There is a significant concern regarding the increase of bail bond businesses within the Plan area and their apparent lack of compliance with the Zone Code. These businesses are open 24/7 and are a permissive use in the O-1 zone. The Sector Plan should specifically address bail bonding and restrict their locations within the Sector Plan.
- 11) There is a need for more convenient and appropriately located commercial uses that serve the neighborhood. Location is everything; neighbors want services carefully sited and designed so they don't detract from the overall residential character of the Plan area. The scale of these neighborhood commercial uses is an important element.
- 12) Office uses are seen as an intrusion into the neighborhood, particularly south of Lomas Boulevard. The Sector Plan should look at limiting the amount of additional office use that can be built in the Plan area. It was noted that some of the larger, historic homes would be difficult to maintain as single family homes.

Transportation Issues

- 1) Lomas Boulevard is the major east-west corridor through the Plan area. Lomas is designated a principal arterial by the Current Roadway Classification System by the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG). Lomas appears to have excess right-of-way and consideration should be given to implementation of traffic 'taming' techniques such as curb extensions (bulb-outs) and lane narrowing in order to ease north-south pedestrian flow across Lomas. Pedestrian amenities such as benches and street trees are lacking or inconsistent along Lomas.
- 2) Central Avenue has been the subject of several studies looking at streetscape, cross sections, land uses, etc. There is also a current study that is being coordinated by the City Council, specifically Councilor Isaac Benton. Reynolds and Huning Castle NAs are working with Councilor Benton concerning specific improvements to Central Avenue. The Sector Plan should review these studies and include the relevant information as a part of the Sector Plan update process.
- 3) Pedestrian accessibility is a challenge in many parts of the Plan area. There are numerous streets with missing sidewalk sections, deteriorated sidewalks, or very narrow sidewalks. Many intersections are missing one or more ADA compliant curb ramps. Some curb ramps are significantly offset from the intersection.
- 4) Many sidewalk sections without parkway strips have ADA deficient driveway cut designs.
- 5) 12th/Mountain intersection has functional issues. Mountain Road has a left turn lane east of Seventh Street within a 32' face-to-face (curb-to-curb) roadway section. Can this be applied to 12th Street which is 31' face-to-face?
- 6) Maintenance of alleys is a concern within the Plan area. Most of the alleys are not maintained well and some have become a nuisance to the neighborhood attracting homeless people and trash accumulation.
- 7) Coordination is needed with the Great Streets Plan, which has been through the EPC process, but has not been approved by City Council. Mountain Road is designated as a 'Bicycle Boulevard' with an 18 mph speed limit.

Street Trees

- 1) While there are some streets that contain street trees, there are many streets that are missing a street tree canopy that is a character defining element for many parts of the Plan area. Sometimes one side of the street has trees and not the other side, and in many instances,

there are no street trees at all. Specific streets that are lacking street trees are called out in the tour notes.

- 2) Street trees are uprooting sidewalks in some areas. Recommendation would be to identify appropriate species for this planting condition between the curb and sidewalk in the Sector Plan.