
Section Two

Plan Elements

I

Fundamental Goals

NEIGHBORHOODS

Recognize walkable neighborhoods and districts as essential building blocks of a more sustainable city and region.

Strong and healthy neighborhoods, because they operate at a scale where people walk and interact, are essential to successful and sustainable urbanization. Organizing development within walkable mixed-use districts and neighborhoods supports transit, economizes on infrastructure, and respects the environment.

Bring homes, businesses and daily destinations—like retail and community facilities—closer together within neighborhoods and districts.

Most homes should be within walking distance of a mixed-use village center containing retail, community services, and a small park or plaza. Studies have shown that this walkable pattern of development can reduce the number of vehicle-trips dramatically. Walkable districts and neighborhoods also have proven social and economic benefits resulting from better access to basic needs, amenities, safer and more active streets, improved health through physical activity, and greater cultural cohesion.

Distribute schools and parks throughout Volcano Heights, in accessible locations where children will not have to cross a busy street to get to them. Schools should not be isolated from but instead located in village centers or linked to the trail network and co-located with parks.

These locations create a rich learning environment for children to experience community life and nature. When schools and parks are closer to home, parents can spend more time with their children, older children can enjoy greater independence, and personal health and fitness improves. Co-locating schools and parks makes better use of limited public dollars and provides more developable land. Locating schools near village centers integrates schools into the neighborhood and fosters a sense of community.

Develop schools that are welcoming community facilities providing multiple uses for residents of all ages.

Schools should be integrated into the communities through their physical design and location, the programs offered, and policies concerning access. Recreational, civic, human service, and educational programs should be provided there to all members of the community at extended hours after school, on the weekends, and during the summer.

Promote diverse housing options throughout Volcano Heights.

A variety of housing types—at varying densities—allows residents, if they choose to do so, to move through all stages of life within the same neighborhood. Housing diversity will also promote business attraction and balanced development on the West Side.

TRANSPORTATION

Provide a choice of viable transportation options for commuting and daily needs.

Walking is a liberating travel option, especially for children and the elderly. At greater distances, transit should offer a convenient alternative to Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOV). Reducing reliance on the automobile reduces congestion and pressures to widen roads and bridges, especially at regional “pinch points” like the Rio Grande.

Support an efficient and reliable transit system.

To support frequent service with less public subsidy, transit corridors should be lined with higher densities and major retail, commercial, and employment destinations. In suburban settings, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) presents a cost-effective alternative with travel times that compete with door-to-door car use and paves the way for potential future light rail routes. Exclusive transit (and HOV) lanes are incorporated into Paseo del Norte and Unser in order for transit to draw closer to the performance of SOV, especially important to attract middle class commuters.

Create “Great Streets” for people as well as cars, by providing street trees, landscaping, wide sidewalks and active uses.

Paseo del Norte and Unser will adopt boulevard configurations through the Town Center to help secure these desirable activities. Streets should feel safe and comfortable for pedestrians. The design of streets and the buildings that face them influences whether someone will choose to walk. Pedestrian-friendly streets have wide sidewalks, street trees and slow moving traffic. They also have pedestrian scaled buildings with frequent entries, windows, and attractive features. Parking lots and blank walls should be minimized along pedestrian routes.

Connect different uses and areas by an efficient and convenient street network.

Streets should not create barriers that separate people and neighborhoods. Instead, streets should create safe and direct connections between common destinations. Streets should also be designed to control auto speeds and be a comfortable place for neighbors to come together. Rather than concentrate traffic, street will distribute traffic through greater connectivity of roadways.

EMPLOYMENT

Support the creation of a major jobs center in Volcano Heights.

Most working West Side residents commute to work east of the Rio Grande (many in downtown Albuquerque or along Interstate 25), which explains regional traffic congestion at river crossings and on the West Side. Major job growth in Volcano Heights will provide opportunities for working closer to home and will “reverse” commutes in a direction where roads have existing capacity. Frequent and reliable transit service will be provided for these new workers.

Establish a mixed-use town center as a transit-oriented development that offers a range of retail, commercial and entertainment destinations, urban housing and employment opportunities.

While neighborhood retail can meet most daily requirements, many needs must be met within larger centers that receive the patronage of greater populations. A mixed-use Town Center will bring to Volcano Heights and the West Side opportunities for comparison-shopping, entertainment, restaurants, cultural activities, and government services. Following the West Side Strategic Plan, a well-designed central plaza will serve as a focus for community life in the Town Center and create a sense of place. Many people prefer dense urban housing in mixed-use environments, which greatly increase the likelihood of walking and transit use. Transit, amenities and housing in the Town Center will help to attract employment to the West Side.

OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS

Establish an interconnected open space network comprised of parks, arroyos, the Petroglyph National Monument, and other open spaces.

While development in Volcano Heights equals the loss of open space that many citizens have enjoyed, it is also an opportunity to purchase and conserve open space into perpetuity. An organized system of open space can help conserve the natural environment, mitigate the impacts of development, and provide exceptional recreational opportunities. Opportunities to experience nature should be plentiful, especially for children. Often, these open space features can form the boundary of neighborhoods and maintain distant views to the Volcanos and Sandia Mountains.

Drainage channels have played an important cultural role for prehistoric communities, connecting ceremonial sites on the mesa across the escarpment to Pueblo villages along the Rio Grande. They can be used today to form an interconnected east-west trail system along these original pathways.

Conserve Volcano Heights' arroyos and encourage residents' connections with nature.

The area's arroyos contain valuable habitat and scenic features that are distinctive. The arroyos contain many unique animals and plants, many used for medicinal and ceremonial purposes by Native American and Hispanic people, which could be threatened by development and a dramatic increase stormwater run-off that accompanies it. As linear open spaces, the arroyos and open space along Petroglyph National Monument also offer unique opportunities for trails.

Respect Albuquerque's patrimony of culture and history, both Hispanic and Native American, through the development of Volcano Heights.

Volcano Heights provides a unique portal to understand the rich interplay of cultures that is New Mexico. The "story" (actually stories) of the meaning of this place to Native American can be told through living and visiting in Volcano Heights, and by the way we develop this special area. As such, Volcano Heights can be another entry point for all of Albuquerque into different and important perspectives on humans' place on earth and spiritual path.

Preserve the Volcano Height natural environment through Conservation Development.

In lower density residential areas, establish a form of Albuquerque subdivision that reduces the development's impact on the natural environment and integrates resource conservation into the fabric of the community.

VIEWS AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Conserve Volcano Heights' archeological resources and protect and emphasize views and visual connections to the Volcanos, Sandia Mountains and the Rio Grande.

The Volcanoes, Petroglyph National Monument, outcrops of basalt especially containing petroglyphs, the Sandia Mountains, and other locations are sacred places for many Native Americans which still figure into their ceremonial practices. The Native Americans have left petroglyphs, evidence of prehistoric settlement, and other artifacts with still active religious and cultural value. Spiritual contemplation often embraced views to the Volcanoes, the Sandia Mountains and the Rio Grande, views that are appreciated by all cultures. Views can be protected and enhanced through considerate site planning, by creating view corridors using streets and arroyos, and by emphasizing lower scale development along the view corridors.

Maintain scenic edges for Albuquerque, protect important views, and minimize the visual impact of development on the western horizon as seen throughout the city.

The westernmost portions of the Plan area, adjacent to the rising mass of the volcanic cones, will be conserved as open space with residential homes that are clustered or maintained at rural densities. In addition, height, color and other visual qualities will be controlled along the "front edge" of Volcano Heights—just above the escarpment and throughout lower density residential areas. The built environment and landscape along the edge of Volcano Heights and the Petroglyph National Monument will form a pleasant transition from the natural area to the developed area. As seen from within Volcano Heights, open space constitutes an important resource that demands special landscape and architectural treatments.

Encourage practices that are economically, aesthetically and environmentally sound

Electrical utility distribution lines should be placed underground. Infrastructure improvements should promote and make visible an environmental ethic for the area.

Encourage architectural and landscape treatments that are consistent with the region's traditions and climate, and help to establish a unique sense of place.

Albuquerque's design traditions spring from its arid climate, intense sun, local materials and the cultural background of its inhabitants. These considerations deserve continued attention, out of respect for the past and also out of concern for an energy- and water-efficient future.

DEVELOPMENT PHASING

Provide for the orderly expansion of infrastructure and public facilities in the area

Volcano Heights' infrastructure improvements will need to be phased in a way that recognizes technical limitations and available funding and that provide infrastructure and facilities in a timely way to meet the needs of residents and local employees. Elementary school boundary areas are used as the organizing principle for the timing and phasing of growth.