

APPENDIX E:

Barelas & South Broadway Community Vision Statements

BARELAS: A COMMUNITY VISION FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE RAILYARDS

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A Brief Community History

Barelás is one of Albuquerque's oldest neighborhoods. Originally settled during the Spanish Colonial period it has gone through numerous cultural and economic changes over the years. This includes its early colonial history as a significant river crossing route for the El Camino Real and its development as a thriving farming community in the early 1800's. Early development took place in and around the farms adjacent to the swamps of the Rio Grande and three irrigation ditches that served the community, the primary one being the Acequia Madre de Barelás.

The arrival of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad to Albuquerque in the 1880's effectively transformed the small farming village into the largest industrial complex in the territory. The company built a station house, switchyards, car shops, roundhouses for locomotive repair, warehouses, and office buildings on the eastern edge of the Barelás community. As a result lands around the original town site of Barelás began to flourish with commerce and housing as the railroad industry employed as many as 1500 people during the height of railroad construction. In 1914 the Santa Fe Railroad remodeled and upgraded the steam engine repair shops providing additional employment for Bareleños. These shops employed men from Barelás who were descended from the original Hispanic families who settled the area as well as a diverse group of immigrants. Many of the newcomers were Chicano/Hispano migrants from rural villages and farming communities throughout New Mexico who came in search of work and new opportunities.

The merger of U.S. Routes 85 and 66 through the center of the community (4th Street) in 1924-1926 gave rise to further commercial development. Over the next 30 years, the area flourished, reaching its commercial peak in the mid-1950s as a thriving automobile commercial and tourism strip. The commercial strip offered local residents and farmers from Albuquerque's South Valley a full line of businesses, and provided Route 66 motorists a range of gas stations, grocery stores, and souvenir shops. At the height of activity, 4,000 to 6,000 cars traveled through the community each day.

By the mid 1950's the community began entering a long period of economic decline and disinvestment. The Santa Fe Railroad began downsizing after converting from steam to diesel locomotives and eventually shut down altogether in 1970. Route 66 and 85 were rerouted and the completion of Interstate Highways 25 and 40 in 1966 further diverted traffic away from the neighborhood. In 1970 much of South Barelás was razed as part of the Urban Renewal Program displacing one-third of the neighborhood's population. The final blow to the economy in Barelás came in 1974 when the construction of Civic Plaza effectively cut off through city traffic on 4th Street (Vazquez et al. 2001). Several historic commercial buildings and historic houses were demolished during this period as the economic vitality of the community continually spiraled down to the point where it was placed on the Federal list of neighborhoods located in the Pocket of Poverty.

Redevelopment Impacts on the Barelás Neighborhood

Over the last three decades Barelás has begun to experience waves of revitalization and significant public investments. The Barelás community is now home to the National Hispanic Cultural Center, the Rio Grande Zoo, the Hispano Chamber of Commerce, a renovated Tingley Park, new housing developments, a revitalized 4th Street corridor, and the imminent redevelopment of the Barelás Railyards. All of these developments, attractions, and institutions have drawn new businesses, countless visitors, and numerous first time residents to the Barelás neighborhood. While good for the overall economic growth of the neighborhood, these past private/city sponsored investments have not necessarily accounted for the devastating effects development can have on historic communities like Barelás.

Unfortunately, redevelopment and revitalization have also been accompanied by "gentrification" a process whereby minorities, traditional families, and lower income residents are displaced and priced out of the neighborhood due to increasing real estate values and higher property taxes. Barelás is especially vulnerable to development and gentrification pressures due to the neighborhood's central location, sizable Hispanic population (84%), large

number of renters (50%), significant number of households that currently fall under the poverty level (31%), and a low median household income of \$18,657 that is still less than half the \$45,147 for Bernalillo County (US Census Bureau; BSDP 2008:18-19). As a consequence the neighborhood is now in the early stages of gentrification, which may threaten the long-term ability of lower income residents to remain in the community.

The redevelopment of the Railyards has become a key issue for Bareleños as it has significantly contributed to the historical growth and identity of the Barelas neighborhood and represents one of the last opportunities to avoid or at least limit the negative impacts of gentrification. Currently home to roughly 3,345 residents, the community is surrounded by the downtown corridor to the north; the Rio Grande Zoo and the Bosque/Rio Grande on the west; the National Hispanic Cultural Center and the South Barelas Industrial Park to the south; and the Railyards complex on the east. Its centralized location makes Barelas a desirable place to live while providing very little open space for new housing construction. At the same time much of the redevelopment over the past forty years has equated to displacement, a significant loss of housing stock for the community, and has failed to adequately replace the jobs that were lost during the closure of the Railyards and the rerouting of traffic away from 4th Street.

Consider the Urban Renewal Program that leveled much of South Barelas in the 1970's when the area was rezoned for industrial uses. The removal of most of the houses south of Bridge Boulevard not only resulted in the significant loss of housing stock for the Barelas community, but ultimately resulted in the displacement of many traditional families to other parts of Albuquerque. More recently, the expansion of the Rio Grande Zoo and the construction of the National Hispanic Cultural Center have been great for the overall economic development and cultural profile of the city of Albuquerque. But both institutions have also contributed to the gentrification of the neighborhood in terms of loss of land and housing stock while their focus on a broader city and state wide service community has offered very little direct benefits to the residents of Barelas. What we wish to emphasize here is that while revitalization and new development are both extremely important to the economic growth and sustainability of the community, it is also important to recognize that redevelopment must be undertaken in a responsible way that enhances rather than harms the cultural and historical continuity of the Barelas community.

The community of Barelas continues to have a strong attachment to the site as the influx of people associated with the Railyards also brought their cultural traditions along with them and helped establish ongoing community celebrations such as the Sacred Heart Fiestas and the Las Posadas reenactment that is now celebrating its sixty-year anniversary. Many of the current residents also have relatives who either worked in the locomotive shops or

remember how much the daily Railyards operations and work schedule coincided with community life in the neighborhood. The redevelopment of the Railyards presents a unique opportunity to create a mixed-use development that connects with the Barelás community, provides direct benefits such as living-wage jobs, (permanently) affordable housing, and usable community spaces, and takes advantage of the historical and cultural traditions the Railyards helped create.

A Community Vision for the Redevelopment of the Railyards

Barelás community members have been organizing around the redevelopment of the Railyards for the past decade. These organizing efforts have become more formalized over the past four years when the neighborhood enlisted the services of the University of New Mexico's Research Center for Raza Planning (RCRP), the Design Planning and Assistance Center (DPAC), and a community organizer to create and implement a community planning strategy. The goal was to conduct extensive community outreach and organize a series of "pláticas" and community workshops to address neighborhood concerns about the future development of the Railyards, gentrification, maintaining affordable housing, and ensuring the cultural vitality of the community. All of the pláticas, workshops, and organizing efforts "are part of a long-term community planning process to ensure that the Barelás neighborhood is proactively involved in the planning and design of the Railyards redevelopment, and to maximize benefits to the community (e.g., affordable housing, locally serving and living wage jobs, economic infusion) while minimizing negative impacts (e.g traffic, noise," and gentrification) (Jonathan Rose Report 2007:1).

The result was the creation of the Barelás Community Coalition (BCC), a non-profit partner of the Barelás Neighborhood Association (BNA), with the objective of representing the community in the planning, design, and development of the Barelás Railyards. In addition to its focus on the redevelopment of the Railyards, the BCC is a community-based planning and housing/economic development organization dedicated to limiting the negative effects of gentrification and development on historic communities like Barelás through the promotion of community-based planning and the development of a comprehensive permanently affordable housing and rehabilitation program that improves the physical condition and energy efficiency of homes for qualifying low income households, increases and promotes homeownership, and develops a permanently affordable housing stock for the community.

Permanent Affordability and Homeownership:

Permanently affordable housing in the redevelopment is a priority for the community, particularly at levels affordable to Barelás residents. When the City of Albuquerque purchased the Railyards in November of 2007, they guaranteed the development of at least 30 units of Workforce Housing in the Railyards complex as a conditional use of Work Force Housing Funds toward the purchase. Barelás residents strongly supported this legislation as the availability of affordable housing in the neighborhood has been a major concern for some time. “Permanently affordable” housing as opposed to “affordable” housing insures that housing remains affordable over the long-term, even after resale, as subsidies are attached to the home rather than the homeowner. The long-term availability of affordable units in turn could help create a more healthy homeowner to renter ratio in Barelás (roughly 50% of households in Barelás are renters) by transitioning low-income renters into homeowners even as property values in the area continue to rise.

Barelás community members have looked at a number of permanently affordable housing models over the last few years including: Deed Restricted Ownership Housing, Community Land Trust, Limited Equity Housing Cooperatives, and Mutual Housing Associations. After considerable research and countless community meetings, workshops, and pláticas members of the community settled on the Community Land Trust (CLT) model as an ideal way to provide long-term affordable housing options for existing and future residents. As a community we strongly encourage developers and members of the Railyards Advisory Board to educate themselves about the CLT and other permanently affordable housing models and their potential benefits to the long-term stability of historic communities like Barelás.

Bareleños believe that the community needs to have a place at the table when it comes to the writing of the RFP for housing and the selection of developers. In terms of the required number of work force housing, we hope the advisory board and the future master developer for the Railyards, once selected, will work with community members and organizations (such as the BNA/BCC) to select a housing developer who employs a permanently affordable model that is appropriate for the economic, environmental, and social conditions of the neighborhood. It is important for there to be a community process to help determine the type of housing needed (i.e. ownership, rental, single-family) as the Barelás and South Broadway communities are most affected by these decisions.

Retail and Services:

Many Barelás residents have expressed a desire to have neighborhood supportive retail in the development, however, they are adamant that commercial retail at the Railyards not compete but compliment and support existing neighborhood businesses especially along 4th Street. The type of neighborhood supportive retail community members have suggested includes: a plaza with restaurants, retail, and space for performing arts, café, bakery, laundromat, hardware store, bank, and convenience store. Many would also like to see a marketplace or Mercado that could be used to support local owners and artisans. There is, however, a strong desire to avoid national chains or strip-mall type of stores that are oriented towards vehicles. Instead the focus should be on creating incentives to increase local ownership of retail business.

Planning and Design:

The planning and design of the Railyards is critical in terms of how the future development ultimately integrates with the existing Barelás neighborhood. This is of particular concern with the homes directly adjacent to the site along 2nd Street where the architectural character, building heights, and streetscaping of the Railyards development should create a seamless flow between new and existing developments. When it comes to the planning and design of the Railyards we cannot emphasize enough that “SCALE AND CONNECTIVITY ARE EVERYTHING”.

By this we mean to stress that streets running east—west (i.e. Santa Fe, Pacific, etc...) should flow through the Railyards development and not end with dividing walls or blocks on 2nd Street. The key issue is that any development especially housing should not be created in a way that cuts off or separates itself from the older housing or business in the larger Barelás community. New housing and retail development should also fit in with the current scale and design of the community. Appropriate design guidelines for the community including scale and landscape can be found in the appendices to the Barelás Sector Development Plan (2008): “Barelás Neighborhood Commercial Area Revitalization Plan” (1994) and the “Design Guidelines for Infill Housing: Barelás, San Jose, & South Broadway Neighborhoods” (1999).

The community also identified streetscaping as an important design element that can be used to integrate the Railyards development with the existing neighborhood. By this we mean to point out that streetscaping for the Railyards redevelopment should be integrated with streetscaping improvements for the existing Barelás neighborhood. A consistency in

streetscaping can also be used to define main pedestrian corridors and support connectivity within the neighborhood. Common streetscaping elements, for example, should be used to connect the Railyards development with other destinations such as the 4th Street commercial corridor, downtown, South Broadway, the Zoo, the National Hispanic Cultural Center, Tingley Park, Tingley Beach, and the Bosque.

Historical Preservation and Building Heights:

As noted earlier the historic Railyards buildings hold strong symbolic connections to the neighborhood's cultural history and architectural design and character. The larger building highlighting the eastern skyline in particular is considered to be a major focal point of the community. It is no surprise then that the one constant throughout all of our conversations pertaining to the redevelopment of the Railyards has been Barelás resident's unwavering support for preserving these historic buildings, particularly the exterior shells and walls, along with elements of the round house and transfer station. Many residents have also expressed a strong desire seek historic designation for these buildings as well.

Assuming that the Railyards buildings, especially their exterior shells, remain intact as part of the Railyards redevelopment residents believe the historic buildings (estimated to be 5 to 6 stories) should also be the height threshold for all new buildings in the development. With the larger building as a height threshold and focal point, newly developed building heights should then be tapered down from the major buildings with building heights on the edge of the Railyards development (especially along 2nd Street) limited to no more than 2 or 3 stories. The community's desire for the historic preservation of the Railyards buildings and building heights are also outlined in the recently updated Barelás Sector Development Plan (2008).

Architectural and Sustainable Design:

In addition to historic preservation and building heights, Barelás residents are also concerned about the design of new buildings and whether or not they will contextually blend in with the existing neighborhood. Recommendations gathered from meetings and workshops that could be used to achieve a seamless flow include: the incorporation of design elements from the existing Railyards buildings (building arches and glass window panes) that are in keeping with current scale; the use of warm colors resonant of New Mexico; and creating tighter design guidelines along the perimeter of the development, especially along 2nd Street, while allowing for more design flexibility in the interior of the site.

Green design is also an important consideration in the design and building of the Railyards site. The community strongly supports the inclusion of sustainable design that fosters resource conservation, energy efficiency, and sustainable landscape. This includes the retrofitting of old and new construction whenever applicable to take advantage of new technology as long as the changes in no way harm the historic classification/designation of the Railyards historic buildings. Residents would also like to see the incorporation of strategies that would reduce parking and encourage walking, biking and public transportation throughout the site.

Parking and Traffic Considerations:

Parking and traffic issues will remain a major concern regardless of what types of uses are ultimately selected for the Railyards development. As it stands now the Barelás neighborhood already serves as a major thoroughfare moving traffic from downtown to the South Valley (2nd, 3rd, 4th, & 8th) and I-25 (Lead and Coal). The neighborhood also continues to suffer from overflow parking from Downtown, the Zoo, and the National Hispanic Cultural Center. Planning for the Railyards development must seriously consider how the amount and location of parking will affect traffic going through the Barelás neighborhood. This includes the location of access points and traffic levels. The amount and location of parking will also be influenced by the types of uses that are included in the redevelopment. Commercial and residential uses, for example, generate different types of parking requirements. Regardless of the type of developments selected, residents believe that parking should be limited to targeted locations in the Railyards to limit the amount of traffic going through the neighborhood. Suggested locations include the northern, southern and eastern locations of the site.

Barelás residents have also expressed interest and concern with traffic impacts to the neighborhood, including increased volume and speeds. Traffic calming measures should be incorporated in planning and design of the Railyards and should also coincide with traffic calming measures currently being implemented on 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 8th Streets. The main concern here is that Barelás residents want to make sure that all efforts to minimize the impacts of parking and traffic to the neighborhood are explored. This includes a collaborative effort between the neighborhood, the Railyards Advisory Board, the City and potential developers in defining the desired amounts and designated locations for parking.

Public Access, Community Spaces, and Living Wage Jobs:

The planning and design of the Railyards should also contain the inclusion of shared indoor/outdoor community spaces, something community members have clearly expressed in terms of our desire for public access and the integration of open spaces into the Railyards redevelopment. Desired community spaces also include: converting the turntable/roundhouse area into a public space/plaza (with neighborhood retail and restaurants around the plaza); converting the spaces between the existing buildings into a plaza and/or a promenade that could serve as connections points to the existing Barelás neighborhood; open space integrated with residential development; public space for the arts; parks, and dispersing gardens, playgrounds, parks and other open spaces throughout the site.

Finally, we believe that it is pertinent to incorporate job creation and job training for local residents in every conversation pertaining to the selection of developers, types of business/retail/attractions, and housing initiatives. This includes the incorporation of first source hiring in building and development contracts, the creation of scholarship funds for Barelás and South Broadway youth and non-traditional students with stipulations of giving back to community, and incentives for locally owned businesses on the site.

Conclusion

The Barelás community has a long and proud history that is intricately linked to the Railyards, and while we understand the new development will attract new visitors/residents and ultimately connect to downtown, we want to make sure it remains a part of the Barelás community and not another space that's a culmination of all the downtown neighborhoods. The neighborhood of Barelás and the Railyards possess a "brand" name that is widely known throughout the city as well as the state of New Mexico and the vision for the identity of the redeveloped Railyards should build on the positive aspects that already exist rather than trying to build a new one.

The creation of a Railyards Advisory Board and the inclusion of community members and elected representatives from the Barelás and South Broadway neighborhoods is an excellent first step in engaging the community in the planning process. We also hope the city and the Advisory Board will encourage the master developer, once selected, to create a "Community Benefits Program" for the Railyards in partnership with the Barelás Neighborhood Association and the Barelás Community Coalition that will maximize the benefits of the Railyards Project to the Barelás and South Broadway communities. Bareleños envision a

Community Benefits Program that will provide publicly accessible park space, open space, and recreational facilities; target employment opportunities to residents in the vicinity of the Railyards development; provide permanently affordable housing; provide basic services needed by the Barelás and South Broadway communities; and address issues of traffic, parking, and public safety.

Members of the Barelás community have been working tirelessly over the last decade to educate ourselves and build the capacity to ensure community participation in all major decisions concerning the future of the Railyards redevelopment. We appreciate the work and support of elected officials such as Councilor Isaac Benton, State Senators Eric Griego and Jerry Ortiz y Pino, and State Representative Miguel Garcia in helping us achieve this endeavor. The community of Barelás looks forward to working with all the members of the Railyards Advisory Board and future developers to create a vibrant multi-use development on the Railyards site that will enhance and not harm the rich history and cultural continuity of the Barelás neighborhood. To make this happen it is imperative that we employ housing and economic development strategies that will revitalize Barelás and South Broadway while limiting the devastating effects of gentrification.

Information in Barelás Community History and Vision sourced from:

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