

1. Project Introduction / Background

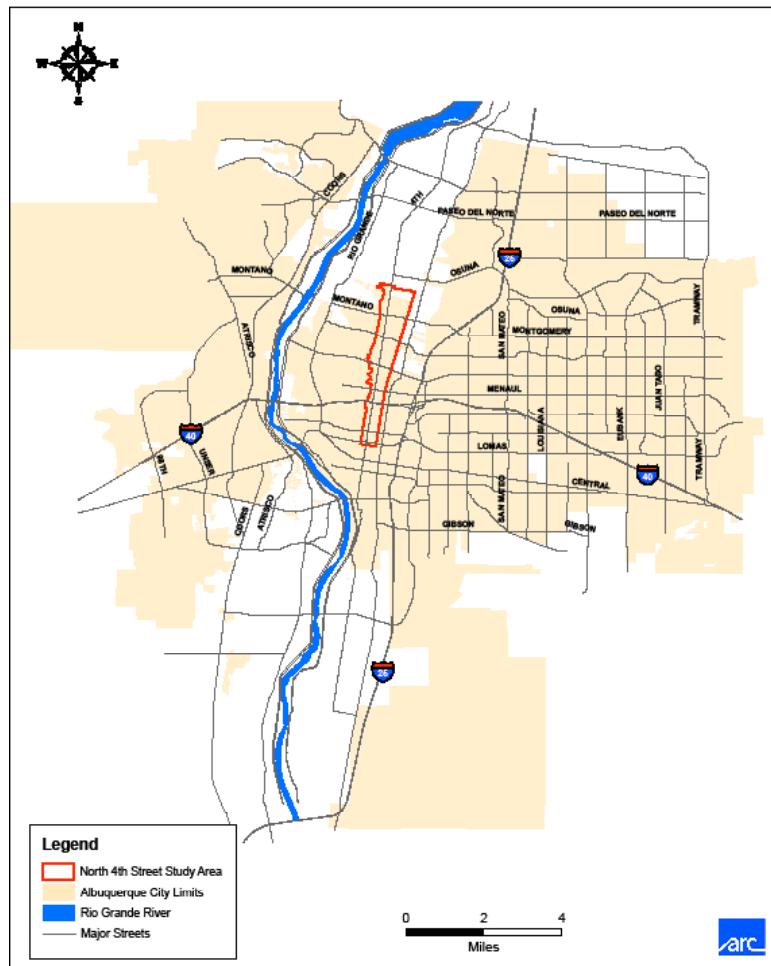
A. Introduction

The City of Albuquerque wishes to redevelop North Fourth Street as a cohesive, integrated transit corridor that promotes shopping, housing, employment, and services and recognizes and builds on existing and potential centers of activity. Over the past several decades, businesses along the street have struggled to remain viable, while traffic and inadequate street design have made the corridor an unappealing place for area residents to shop or walk.

The revitalization area concentrates on North Fourth Street between Lomas Boulevard NW and Solar Road NW, the City's boundary with Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, a four-and-one-third-mile stretch. The plan identifies and recommends a varied set of strategies and programs to make redevelopment possible through public and private investments and policies, as well as public projects that could reinvigorate North Fourth Street and the surrounding area.

This document uses, as its beginning, research conducted for a 2002 study of the portion of the corridor between Mountain Road NW and Douglas MacArthur Road NW. It extends the study area to the north and south over a four-and-one-third-mile stretch.

North 4th Street Area Location Map



B. Goals of the study are:

- Improve the business climate along North Fourth Street
- Improve the physical appearance and infrastructure along North Fourth Street
- Create a unifying vision for the North Valley
- Tie neighborhoods together in a “main street”
- Create a positive force for North Valley improvement.

C. Contents of this study contain information on existing conditions and recommendations for changes. They are:

- Street History
- Demographics and Plan Context
- Real Estate Market Conditions and Merchants’ Issues
- Land Use
- Transportation
- Zoning
- Urban Design
- Redevelopment Tools.

D. Involving the Community

This plan works to balance the factual data about corridor conditions with the expressed needs and issues of landowners, merchants and community members. The study process has brought together the various groups who have the desire to see North Fourth Street survive and thrive. A working group of residents and merchants has helped to guide the plan’s direction, supplemented by formal public meetings and update presentations to various community groups.

E. Overarching Issues of North Fourth Street Addressed by This Project

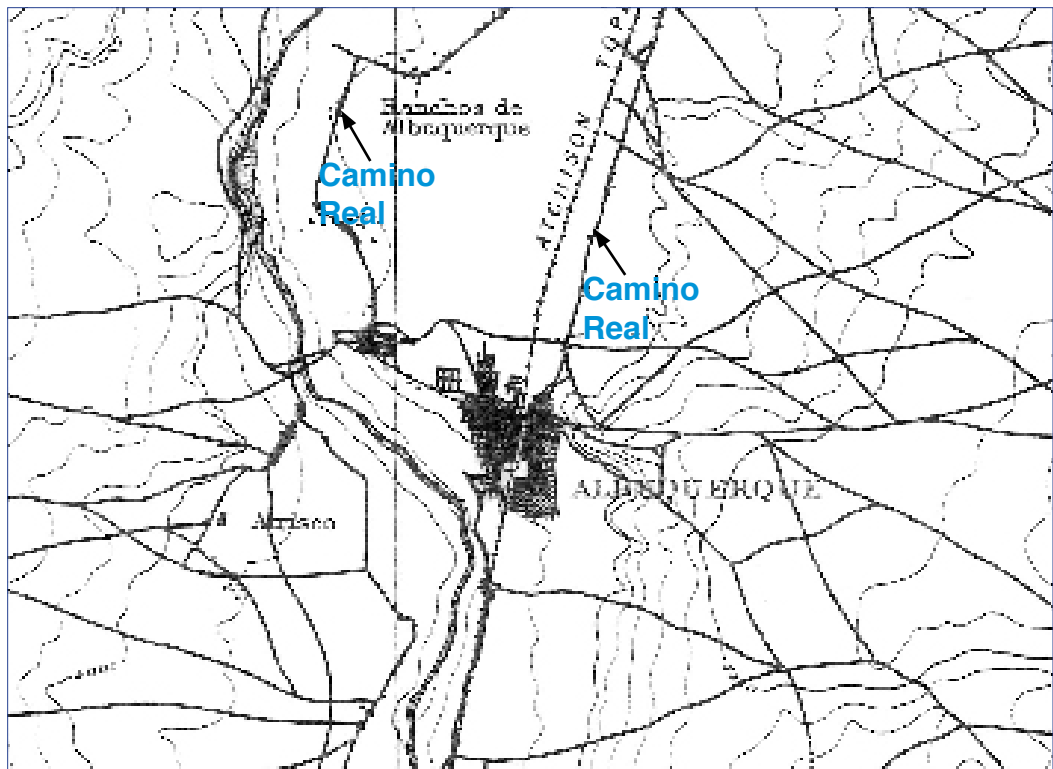
- Declining business vitality/lack of reinvestment
- Declining appearance: poor maintenance, clutter
- High vacancy rates
- Poor match between existing businesses and local consumer needs
- Numerous automotive-related businesses and fast food restaurants, but a lack of other needed services
- Lack of consistent streetfront development
- Variety of setbacks within almost every block
- Street and sidewalks unsafe for pedestrians
- Traffic issues, particularly at Montaña and Griegos intersections
- West Side traffic that heavily impacts 4th Street and east-west streets
- Other traffic from western area of North Valley that has no other outlet due to historic street and ditch patterns.

North Fourth Street's development over the course of the early and mid-20th Century is a precursor to the suburban, leapfrog development that characterizes Albuquerque's post WWII growth. The street's uneven historic development pattern has created many of our redevelopment challenges today. Understanding the architectural and planning contexts of the street can help to guide recommendations for physical revitalization.

F. History of North Fourth Street

North 4th Street began its life around the beginning of the 20th century, at the same time that the automobile made independent travel feasible. This part of the Rio Grande Valley tended to be swampy and flooded frequently, making it undevelopable until drainage projects could be constructed.

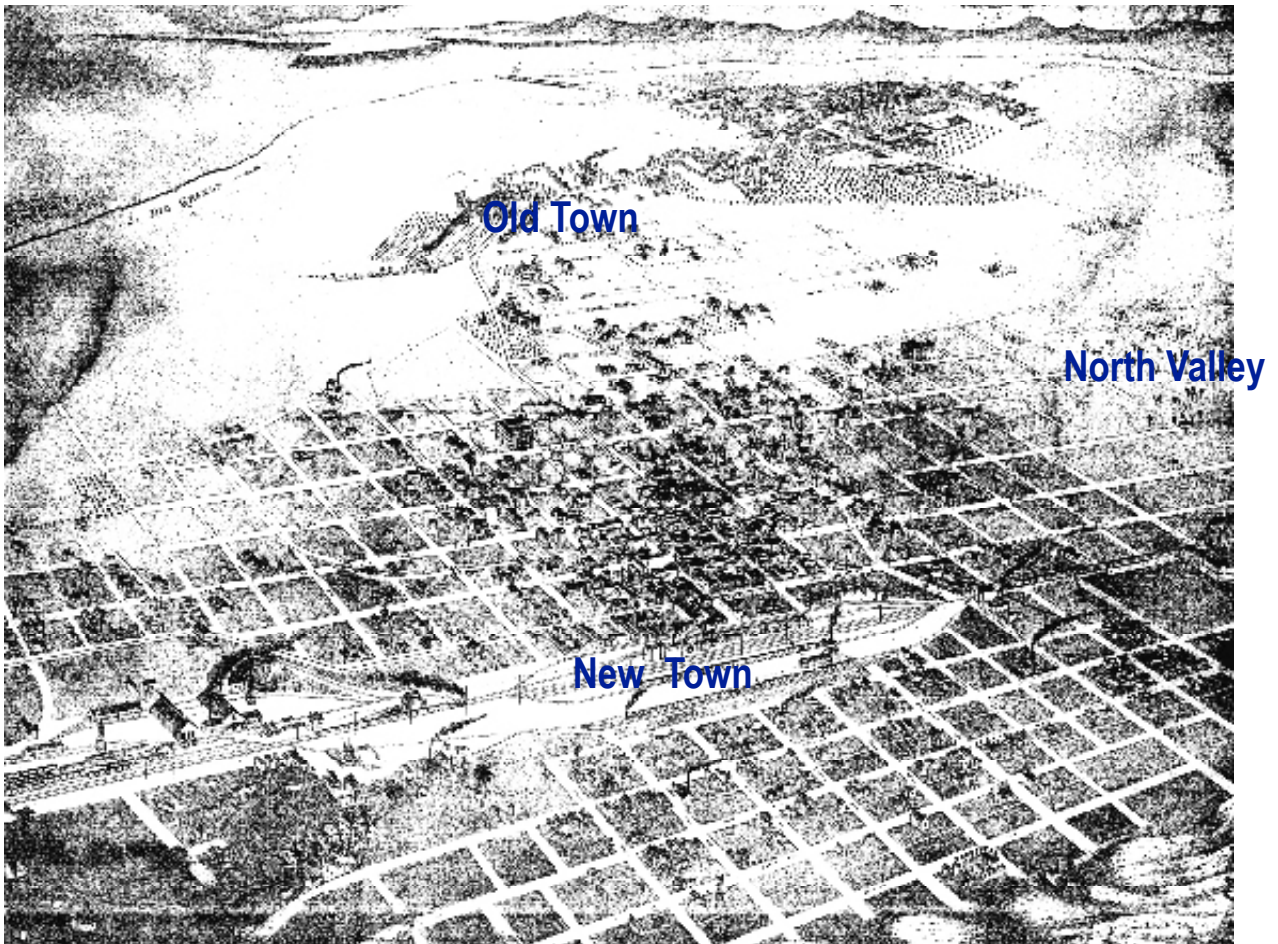
Albuquerque was founded in the area now known as Old Town in 1706. Over time, families built their homes scattered throughout the North Valley, which became small farming villages. They were connected by El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (The Royal Road to/of the Interior Lands), which began in 1598 and extended from Ohkay Owingeh (San Juan Pueblo) to Mexico. El Camino Real, also known as the Chihuahua Trail, was the North Valley's first European road. A common misperception is that North Fourth Street was the historic Camino Real: it was not. El Camino Real had two alternate routes through the North Valley. These were along Edith Boulevard, also known as the Bernalillo Road and through the western portion of the North Valley. Villages including Los Duranes, Los Candelarias and Los Griegos were linked by El Camino Real and would have used the road for local and regional commerce.



Albuquerque area in 1888

North Fourth Street Study: Rank III Corridor Plan

Review Draft - 6/06



An 1886 birdseye view of Albuquerque

The coming of the railroad in 1880 brought new development to the Albuquerque area. As New Town began its life, developers platted out streets and blocks in a grid system. Turn-of-the-century maps show the grid, but also how sparsely developed the town actually was within a few blocks north of Central (Railroad) Avenue. New Town was 3.1 square miles in extent, with Mountain Road as its northern boundary. North 4th Street began to extend outward from New Town with the advent of the automobile and was Albuquerque's first street truly formed by the auto and the dramatic changes it brought.

In 1910, Albuquerque had 32 registered cars, with only 470 statewide. By 1920, there were 17,720 cars registered in New Mexico and nearly 84,000 by 1930. The explosion of car ownership required well-maintained roads, businesses to sell and repair the vehicles, as well as services for the visitors who had the nearly-overnight freedom to travel throughout the U.S.

The 1904 territorial legislature, having some inkling of the future impact of cars, designated the first highway, New Mexico Route 1. It followed the Santa Fe Trail from Raton to Santa Fe, then ran south along El Camino Real through Bernalillo and Alameda. It created an extension of 4th Street north of Albuquerque, continued south on 2nd Street at Central to Bridge Street, west to the Barelás Bridge, then South on Isleta following El Camino Real toward the south, then following the the west bank of the Rio Grande down to El Paso. Recognizing an opportunity to tie this state-long route to the historic heritage of the state, road builders named the new road El Camino Real.

In a short period of time, a journey to Santa Fe that had once taken three days could be accomplished in less than a day. While Route 1, the new Camino Real, was unpaved for several more decades, its surface was maintained on a regular basis and offered reasonably fast travel times. In time, it made possible the extension of urban and suburban development northward from the expanding New Town core.

North Fourth Street had several route numbers and names in the early 20th century, reflecting the developing system of state and national highways, but causing confusion today. Its first official route name was State Highway 1, named El Camino Real because some parts of the road were on the Camino Real's original alignment. In 1926, North Fourth Street was designated as part of U.S. Highway 85, which extended from El Paso to Santa Fe. Then from 1926 to 1937, North Fourth Street became part of U.S. Route 66, which originally passed through Santa Rosa to Las Vegas, west to Santa Fe and down to Albuquerque. Routes 85 and 66 were considered part of a U.S. Transcontinental Highway.

A map from 1938 shows the North Valley's major streets, some of which have since been extended, while others have partially disappeared. The map indicates that there was little connection between the Valley and what is now the Northeast Heights, still largely undeveloped. The map also shows ditches, drains and laterals. While some remain, others appear to have either disappeared or been rerouted.



The North Valley in 1938

**North Fourth Street Study:
Rank III Corridor Plan**
Review Draft - 6/06

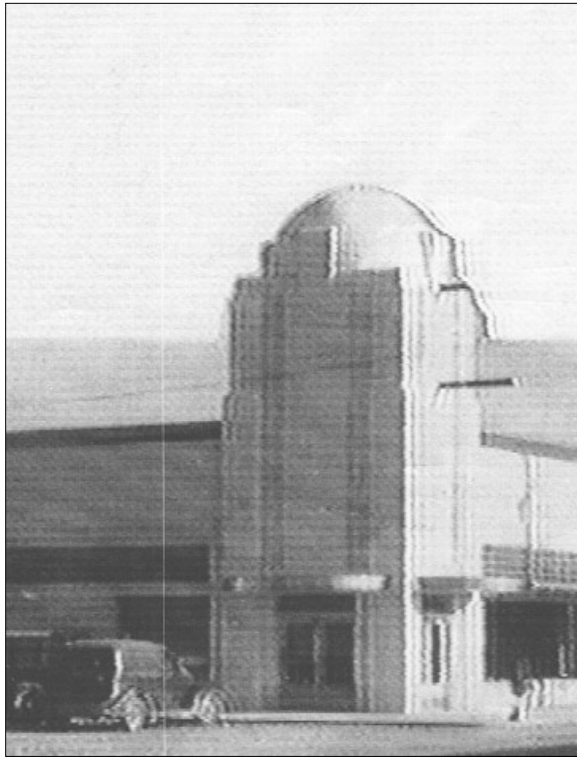
This photo from the 1930s shows how narrow North Fourth Street was, and how prone to flooding. Even today, small portions of the street are in the 100-year flood zone.



Development along the street was rarely done in an orderly, sequential pattern. Some buildings were set close to the street, while others were set back. Houses were scattered along the street between commercial structures. A school, supermarkets, movie theaters, motels, tourist camps: most functions came and went with changes in consumer demands. Some buildings were demolished, while others remain today, but barely recognizable under decades of remodeling. No buildings along North Fourth Street have National Historic Register status. A single building on North Fourth Street has received State of New Mexico Historic Register status: the Shalit House, located at the southwest corner of Douglas MacArthur and North Fourth Street. The house, built in 1940, was converted to Powdrell's Barbecue about 20 years ago. It retains its original character and is surrounded by attractive lawns, but is currently for sale, its future uncertain.

Remaining Original Structures on North Fourth Street

A few of the original buildings remain on the street and still retain their original character or style. With rare exceptions, the buildings are one story in height and were constructed economically, in fairly simple styles that reflect their times.



Surviving buildings on North Fourth Street

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