



## **Rail Yards Advisory Board**

Wednesday, January 9, 2013

5:30 PM

Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Government Center  
Vincent E. Griego Council Chambers

### **DRAFT MINUTES**

#### **Members Present:**

Isaac Benton, City Councilor, District 3  
Diana Dorn-Jones, South Broadway  
Leba Freed, Wheels Museum  
Rep. Rick Miera  
Sen. Jerry Ortiz y Pino  
Eric Griego  
Jay Rembe, ULI – New Mexico  
Ron Romero, Barelás

#### **Members Absent:**

Gilbert Montano for Mayor Berry  
Commissioner Art de la Cruz  
Rep. Miguel Garcia

#### **Staff Resources:**

Kara Shair-Rosenfield, Council Services  
Petra Morris, Planning Department

#### **Presenters:**

Frederick and Laurie Samitaur-Smith, Samitaur Constructs  
Dolan Daggett, Eric Owen Moss Architects / Samitaur Constructs  
Jim Strozier, Consensus Planning

**Councilor Benton** opened the meeting and the board approved the draft minutes of 12-10-12 by unanimous vote. He mentioned that staff had provided draft language and examples from other Boards related to conflicts of interest and recusal from voting for the Boards consideration. He asked the Board to review the materials and said that the Board might want to take up this matter at its next meeting since the focus of this meeting was to receive a presentation on the Master Plan.

**Kara Shair-Rosenfield and Petra Morris** gave a presentation about the public process to date. The process began with a direct mail notification to approximately 4,000 property owners in the neighborhoods around the site, followed by a series of kickoff meetings last year. The project team also met with major stakeholders during a series of targeted meetings, including various City of Albuquerque agencies, the Mid-Region Council of Governments, the Downtown Action Team, the WHEELS Museum, and adjacent neighborhood associations and community groups.

The project team then presented draft concepts for the redevelopment of the Rail Yards to the public during meetings held in October and at a December open house at the Rail Yards, during which approximately 300 people were able to tour the historic buildings.

City staff has also maintained a project website, sought media coverage and distributed notices and updates to an e-mail list of 500 recipients as a way to keep people involved and informed during the process. The hundreds of comments and ideas received from the public during these meetings and events have been recorded and are being used to inform the Master Plan.

**Frederick and Laurie Samitaur-Smith** introduced the draft redevelopment concepts by stressing the importance of establishing relationships with the communities on either side of the project site and said the redevelopment of the Rail Yards would be focused on the creation of jobs for local residents, but that it would not result in gentrification of the area. Frederick Samitaur-Smith said that Samitaur Constructs' projects in Culver City, Calif. have created hundreds of jobs for the neighborhoods in which they are located. Laurie Samitaur-Smith added that they are committed to preserving the site's historic significance.

**Dolan Daggett** presented Samitaur Constructs' conceptual plans for the site and reiterated the development team's commitment to adjacent communities by saying they wanted to reconnect neighborhoods that are physically divided by the site. His presentation covered core structures the team plans to conserve on the site; iconic structures they plan to reconstruct, like the smokestack and roundhouse; their concept for 15-foot-high "paseo" structures that would add square footage to the site without detracting from the historic architecture; sustainability features such as water catchment structures and Samitaur's concept for acoustic mounds along the edges of the site. He also covered site organization and land use concepts, including outdoor public space and areas to be reserved for commercial, cultural, residential and other activities.

The development team's conceptual plans would reserve the historic buildings on the site for commercial tenants, such as office or light manufacturing, which would generate the revenue needed to pay for their preservation. Dolan said the historic structures would attract specialized tenants looking for unique spaces.

Dolan wrapped up his presentation by presenting the conceptual phasing of the site, which the development team proposes would begin with the construction of a retractable cover on the outdoor gantry crane in the southern part of the site, which would be used to shade farmers and artisan markets. Housing could also be an early phase of redevelopment, and the rest would "develop from the inside out" as tenants come in.

**Jim Strozier**, of Consensus Planning, explained how public comments and the development teams' concepts would be used to create the Master Plan document, which will have a formal approval process and which will serve as a framework for the redevelopment of the site by establishing land uses by parcel, architectural and design standards, and other guidelines informed by adopted City policy and public input. He outlined the Master Plan approval process, which will involve seeking recommendations from the Rail Yards Advisory Board and the Environmental Planning Commission with final approval authority resting with the City Council.

#### **Comments and Questions from the Board:**

**Representative Miera** said he was pleased with the presentation but wondered whether the development team is considering more railroad-related uses, such as incorporating paid storage of private railcars and AT&SF 2926, a Baldwin steam locomotive currently undergoing restoration by the New Mexico Steam Locomotive and Railroad Historical Society.

**Dolan Daggett** said the project team was 100% committed to active rail uses on the site and noted that BNSF Railroad would still have access to a turntable on the site under the terms of an

easement there. He said the Master Plan process aimed to create a rubric or structure for land use concepts rather than actually assign specific site users at this time.

**Ron Romero** asked how parking would be handled on the site under Samitaur Constructs' conceptual plan and questioned the feasibility of the proposed 900 spaces of underground parking.

**Dolan Daggett** said the underground parking could be created concurrent with environmental remediation and other efforts, thus lowering costs, and that above-ground parking would not be appropriate for the historic site.

**Ron Romero** asked what the development team's relationship has been with the State Historic Preservation Office and the Landmarks and Urban Conservation Committee.

**Dolan Daggett** said the relationship is a work in progress, and that the team has hired a conservation expert who will begin working with preservation agencies. He acknowledged that preservation is a critical part of the project and said the team would work with those agencies to reach agreements prior to demolition of any structures, etc. He also acknowledged that the proposal suggests the removal of some structures on the site.

**Councilor Benton** asked what buildings the team was proposing to remove.

**Dolan Daggett** said the project team was proposing to remove some sheds and tanks at the north end of the site, the wooden sheet metal shed, the washroom structure, a sheet metal power generation plant constructed in the 1960s and a handful of other small structures. He acknowledged that this would be an ongoing discussion and that the Master Plan would not necessarily succeed or fail based on whether those structures are there or not.

**Senator Ortiz y Pino** asked about parcels outside the site that were highlighted in the presentation.

**Dolan Daggett** explained that those were sites the team had identified as opportunities for the redevelopment to extend into the community, such as the redevelopment of a drainage pond in South Broadway at the northeast edge of the site as a park.

**Senator Ortiz y Pino** asked whether there would be housing in the acoustic mounds.

**Dolan Daggett** said that structures in those mounds are proposed to be used for retail, not residences.

**Diana Dorn-Jones** said that this was the first of many projects proposed for the Rail Yards site over the years that had good neighborhood support. However, she said the South Broadway neighborhood on the site's east side had some issues with a proposed pedestrian bridge over active rail lines to the site – mainly that it would be too expensive and therefore unlikely, and that it would cause a concentration of traffic and parking in the South Broadway neighborhood. Additionally, she said some in the neighborhood feared the acoustic mounds would block views of the site. She said the neighborhood wanted to focus efforts on multiple at-grade access points to the site from the east side, rather than the bridge. She referenced a letter detailing the neighborhood's at-grade crossing research and proposal that was submitted to the planning team on 12/6/2012.

**Leba Freed** asked when the project team was proposing to rebuild the roundhouse and how it might be funded.

**Dolan Daggett** said the team did not know when the rebuilding of the roundhouse might occur, and that it would depend on the presence of a user who would help provide financing for its construction.

**Leba Freed** asked whether a RailRunner station would be located at the site.

**Dolan Daggett** said the team would like to have a station but that, in discussions with MRCOG and other transportation officials, it appeared this would not be an option because of the close proximity of the Alvarado Transit Center. They will include the suggestion that a rail stop be located at the site in the Master Plan, however.

**Leba Freed** asked whether the team had considered locating housing at the north end of the site, rather than at the south end as Samitaur Constructs has proposed, given that there is so much rail activity at the south end and it could cause noise issues.

**Dolan Daggett** said the north end of the site comes to a narrower point, which would actually put housing closer to active train lines. Furthermore, he said that some stakeholders had indicated that connecting the site to downtown would best be done by concentrating commercial activity at the north end, nearest Downtown, with residential at the south end, closer to existing residential neighborhoods and cultural facilities, such as the National Hispanic Cultural Center.

**Councilor Benton** asked whether the team has considered housing along the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street edge of the site, creating a bookend to existing residential uses on the west side of 2<sup>nd</sup>, potentially including the linear Storehouse building as “live-work” units.

**Dolan Daggett** said it would be difficult to create additional buildings that blend with the existing fabric of the storehouse, but that the idea warranted further study.

**Eric Griego** asked why the historic buildings were being reserved for commercial tenants, rather than building new structures on-site to serve these users.

**Dolan Daggett** said Samitaur Constructs was seeking tenants who are in “creative, innovative high-tech fields” that are looking specifically for office space that is an adaptive re-use of iconic structures and who might be able to make use of the vast spaces and existing gantry cranes.

**Eric Griego** asked how the public spaces will be funded if the rehabilitation and preservation of the larger structures was to be funded by tenants.

**Dolan Daggett** said the public uses would be accessory to the business uses, but that the team would have to figure out how to finance them.

**Frederick Samitaur-Smith** said his company has a history of doing this sort of development and has been successful finding tenants willing to contribute funding for similar projects. He gave an example of a professional ballet training academy that Samitaur was able to “install” in one of their spaces because the dance company was able to subsidize creation of the space.

**Eric Griego** asked what public financing tools the team might be considering besides private capital investment.

**Frederick Samitaur-Smith** said his company has a history of building partnerships, and cited one with Kodak that trained “taggers” (graffiti artists) to be graphic artists for movie studios.

**Eric Griego** asked why the farmers market was envisioned for the south end of the Rail Yards if the site’s main entry point was seen as the transfer table and wondered if that area could be opened up as a market instead, especially as it is closer to the Blacksmith Shop, which the Mayor is trying to redevelop for interim uses.

**Dolan Daggett** said that the disrepair of the transfer table and the two building edifices that flank it would make that proposal difficult in the short term. Putting the market on the south end of the site could happen sooner, offers easier access for trucks, and would bring patronage to the WHEELS Museum.

**Eric Griego** asked how visitors would get to the Blacksmith Shop from the south end of the site.

**Dolan Daggett** said they would have to walk around the east side of the site. He added that the team does not see the farmers market at the gantry crane on the south end as an interim use, but more as the first phase of the project, and that it would have better visibility there.

**Ron Romero** asked whether the team was considering more than the 30 units of workforce housing required by the Request for Proposals.

**Dolan Daggett** said there has been some discussion about not having any housing on the site at all, and that it should be in the surrounding neighborhood instead, but that the team aimed to accomplish the 30-unit minimum on-site.

**Ron Romero** said his community would like more housing. Additionally, he said, the maximum height of 45 feet for housing proposed in the draft Master Plan would allow 3 stories, which he thought was out of scale with the 1- and 2-story housing across the street.

**Dolan Daggett** said the Master Plan was just a framework or rubric and should be considered separately from Samitaur's concept plans. However, he said their plans called for housing to be at a 20-foot setback from the edge of the site along 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and the concept design calls for the residential structures to arc away from the street edge.

**Ron Romero** asked about plans for landscaping and other infrastructure improvements in the neighborhood to create connections to 4<sup>th</sup> Street and other areas.

**Dolan Daggett** said that would be addressed in the Master Plan and agreed that it would be good to upgrade connections in the neighborhood.

**Ron Romero** asked when the development team would begin offering job training to residents of the neighborhood.

**Frederick Samitaur Smith** said the team planned to set up job training even before they had tenants so that local residents would be "job ready."

**Jay Rembe** commended the development team for their vision and enthusiasm and cautioned stakeholders and the RYAB not to "whittle down the Plan too much" because these sorts of negotiations can cause developers to abandon a project.

**Diana Dorn-Jones** said she was pleased to hear that jobs would be a focus of the project and said she hoped they would be more than low-paying service jobs. She added that she would like to see a formal agreement requiring tenants to hire within the community. First Source Hiring and the opportunities to work with CNM were also mentioned.

**Councilor Benton** said that the public planning process for the site had resulted in a tremendous amount of comments on various aspects of the project, some of which were repeated multiple times, and that he has not seen this public input manifested in the Master Plan. In addition, he said that the 30-unit housing requirement was a minimum and noted that government subsidies for workforce housing, such as the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, are typically granted to projects at 45 units and larger. Finally, he said he agreed that some sort of rail

connection should be provided to the site, perhaps a “low-tech” train between the site and the nearby Alvarado Transit Center.

**Public Comment:**

**Henry Chavez**, a Barelás resident, asked whether there would be a museum on the site to honor the workers that built it and worked there.

**Leba Freed** said yes, that is part of the aim of the WHEELS Museum.

**Daniel Gutierrez** with the Barelás Community Coalition thanked the project team for their efforts to reach out into the community and keep neighborhoods informed. He asked whether the public process would continue as the project moves forward.

**Jim Strozier** said yes, the Master Plan would articulate how the public would be involved as components of the Plan are phased in.

**Bob Feinberg**, a local commercial realtor, said he applauded the design and concepts but that he was not convinced such a project would be economically feasible given the low office space occupancy and rental values in Albuquerque, as compared to Culver City and the greater Los Angeles area.

**Frederick Samitaur-Smith** said that the team would be attracting tenants from outside Albuquerque. He said that Samitaur Constructs would be responsible for the financial risk and that what they wanted from the community was general goodwill and cooperation. He said their projects in Culver City had “built community” and raised real estate values.

**Peter Armijo**, a resident of South Broadway, said some of his neighbors along Commercial, John, and William Streets were worried about traffic issues for people living directly adjacent to the site’s east side. Furthermore, he said the team should consider a better barrier to reduce noise from the site than just the acoustic mounds. Finally, he said he worried that new landscaping and parks would not be maintained.

**Mike Hartshorne**, president of the New Mexico Steam Locomotive and Railroad Historical Society, said the project would be incomplete without inclusion of the AT&SF 2926 locomotive.

**Jeff Pappas**, the State Historic Preservation Officer, introduced himself and said he was looking forward to working with the development team.

**Richard Kaselow**, a resident of South Broadway, said he appreciated the efforts of all involved and called the draft Master Plan “just the beginning,” calling for everyone to trust the developer from a business perspective and to respond but to keep providing input and feedback.

**Closing Comments from the Board:**

**Ron Romero** said he wished that the many hours of community input were already reflected in the Master Plan, but that he was made more comfortable that the feedback provided to-date would be included with the addition of Consensus Planning to the project team.

**Councilor Benton** said he hoped to see some of the concepts and proposals come to fruition and thanked the board for their dedication over the years.