



Rail Yards Advisory Board

June 1, 2022

8:30 am

Council Committee Room

9th Floor, Suite 9081

MINUTES

I. Call to Order at 8:41 am

II. Welcome & Overview

Members Present:

City Councilor Isaac Benton, Chair

Rep. Miguel Garcia

Sen. Jerry Ortiz y Pino (via Zoom)

Alicia Manzano for Rep. Javier Martinez (via Zoom)

Jay Rembe, ULI-New Mexico

Leba Freed, WHEELS Museum

Frances Armijo, South Broadway Neighborhood

Dorothy Chavez, Barelmas Neighborhood

Members Absent:

COO Lawrence Rael

Senator Michael Padilla

Commissioner Steven Michael Quezada

III. Approval of Minutes:

December 1, 2021 RYAB Meeting

Councilor Benton moved approval, Rep. Garcia seconded, motion passed unanimously

April 2, 2022 RYAB Meeting

Councilor Benton moved approval, Rep. Garcia seconded, motion passed unanimously

IV. Rail Yards Master Plan update: Presentation and discussion

Councilor Benton gave a brief history of the board and the master plan process, RFP for developers, what's in the Master Plan, what the intent of this update is.

Petra Morris, Associate Director of Planning & Policy Development for the City Council, introduced the consultant for the master plan update:

Consensus Planning

Jim Strozier, Jackie Fishman – Principals

Presentation designed to be interactive conversation with the board.

Have been working on the plan update for a month or two.

Figuring out what needs to be struck.

Future Land Use Options – four questions/options were presented.

Need direction from the board for how to approach the land use w/out diverging from overarching goals. How do we approach this as a mixed-use site?

Other changes not substantive but this is, need to have a conversation and board input.

Councilor Benton requested a review of uses as currently regulated in master plan.

Ms. Morris described the location of the parcels and the uses allowed in each. Specific list of uses for each area – some are very broad, such as Machine Shop. Parcel one has very limited uses allowed.

Mr. Rembe – I don't live in the neighborhood but we all realize how hard this site has been to develop. Would give the site as much opportunity to be successful, don't restrict the uses too much. If too restrictive, may prevent the site being developed. The more flexibility the zoning has, the more likely you will see a better project. The more housing you can add to it, the better. Easy to finance, more eyes on the street, gives it a more lively feel, it's 24/7.

Councilor Benton – Samitaur did not want to have housing on the site but it is required as WFHTF money was used to purchase the site. That requires that we have housing on the site. Jay's point speaks to the problem with the current chart in that housing is relegated to one part of the site, with possible live/work housing further north and along 2nd St. The parcelization is a detriment to future development. Look at all of the uses allowed and recognize that these are uses that the neighborhoods felt were acceptable for the site. Explain the procedure for developing on the site even now?

Ms. Morris – Any permanent use on the site (PD zone) requires approval by the planning commission. Updates to master plan will go to the council for approval. Will come back in August, if needed also December.

Ms. Freed agrees it should be limited. Very concerned that anything that comes in that is not a public use will be harmful to the site and the city. COO Rael told her he wants WHEELS in the Machine Shop. They could be a major economic driver for Albuquerque. Doesn't think housing should be on the site, but understands it has to be. Thinks it should be entirely public uses.

Ms. Armijo – Agrees on housing situation. Albuquerque doesn't need more. Single family housing, yes, not sure the Rail Yards is the place for it.

Ms. Chavez – Disagrees. Workforce housing was a big thing for her neighborhood. Our neighborhood needs more housing, we've lost so much.

Ms. Freed met w/Adelle Hunley, mentioned a lot of land in Barelás is available for housing but it's not being built. Maybe that could be transferred into the neighborhoods instead of at the site.

Councilor Benton – Not within the bounds of this discussion except that we need to figure out if we want to expand where housing is allowed. It's very important to the security of the site, security and vitality requires people, not just during the work day.

Ms. Chavez – Only four lots available for the city to work with. The rest are private property that the city can't develop. People own that, we can't make them make housing.

Mr. Rembe – I think we would want to consider more dense housing. Lack of housing all over the country. Agree with public use, may be "throw away" space where we can put in a dense use. With housing, more viable uses. SF rail yards would be better, more dynamic with more housing. We need housing, we need affordable housing.

Ms. Chavez – Height restrictions all over the neighborhood to not lose view of mountains.

Mr. Rembe – Historically, want to do something that makes sense, don't really want new buildings to be seen, stay in the background.

Ms. Chavez wants to stay a neighborhood and not be downtown.

Councilor Benton – Height restrictions. Recollection was that these limits were worked out in consideration of the adjacency to the historic buildings so we are not obstructing the feel.

Ms. Morris – Heights are listed by parcel. Lower closer to 2nd Street and residential, taller near the buildings. Very low at 2nd St just north of Santa Fe entrance. If we don't keep the 10 parcels, we would need to translate bldg heights as much as possible with the update. Weren't planning to change these.

Councilor Benton – highest height translated from Barelás sector plan. Combine parcelization with height?

Mr. Strozier – Could create a height exhibit that doesn't include parcelization. Not necessary to continue height restrictions. Could be spatially designated on the plan, not tied to parcels.

Councilor Benton – Barelás had a sector plan that was updated in 2006/2007 in anticipation of the Rail Yards development.

Ms. Morris – Sector Plan translated into Character Protection Overlay in the IDO. Will make sure the language is clear in the master plan.

Ms. Armijo – Doesn't believe in condos and apartments because it would change the neighborhood. It's a joke that the housing will be affordable.

Councilor Benton – The requirement right now is that 30 units minimum must be affordable.

Ms. Chavez – Worked with Sawmill doing a project at 7th and Iron. Only seen one come up for sale since 2009, just recently. Prices have gone sky high, especially since the Rail Yards development started coming up. People are being priced out of homes just because of taxes. One person bought property and knocked down houses and wants to build 7 units on a small lot.

Mr. Rembe – Ownership vs apartments?

Ms. Chavez – Needs to be a mix.

Councilor Benton – I do think mixed income is a healthy mix. Everything from 30% to market rate. 30 permanent affordable dwelling units – that's a very low number. Probably could not be financed without a project at least double that number. Housing is allowed on the site, will be allowed on the site, the question is parcelization. To Jay's point, having the most flexible mix of uses on the site is going to be the best opportunity to start seeing some outside investment.

Mr. Strozier – To conclude with this part of the discussion, it sounds like there is some support for being more flexible in terms of uses, but it is important to keep height restrictions.

No plans to change historic resources or MOU with SHPO.

Maximum number for housing?

Senator Ortiz y Pino – Maintain maximum flexibility. State is putting a lot of money into affordable housing and is trying to expand as much as possible. Let's make sure that we don't limit future uses that may be really practical and easily funded. State affordable housing money is going to spur investment around the state; the site could benefit from that.

Ms. Morris – The question is whether housing should be limited on the site – location or number? Are there parts of the site where housing maybe isn't appropriate?

Ms. Freed – Concerned that we are talking about the most important historical site in the city or country. To take up the site with 1000 units of housing on this small site.

Mr. Rembe – Agree, not saying we put housing everywhere, just give yourself as much flexibility as possible. The buildings should be protected and for public use.

Councilor Benton – We each have a vision of what the site could be; it's an inspirational place. Been progress, but sitting here today, 15 years down the road, we've had progress, commend this Administration being very supportive of the Rail Yards. That's all been public dollars. The vision of the master plan was that it would be open to private investment and private dollars. Without that, we'll never in our lifetimes see the site developed.

Ms. Fishman – Does it make sense to raise the minimum? As Councilor Benton said, 30 will be very difficult.

Councilor Benton – That number was based on a calculation based on the amount of housing funding that was used. I've always thought that a place where housing might not go is next to the tracks, but then I thought about 1 Central that was built right next to the rail. There are ways to mitigate noise.

Ms. Morris – Master Plan allows housing in parcel 2 (south end), parcel 2 Storehouse if WHEELS were to move to machine shop, and parcel 9 northern end along 2nd St. Those are the only places currently allowed.

Councilor Benton – The mental framework is that we don't know what good idea someone might bring, or a bad idea for that matter. We don't know so we need flexibility. Master plan is really a site development plan that provides broad parameters and protections for development. The fact that Samitaur just wanted to do their program, mostly office and retail, constrains the site presently. Should we just list all of these uses and not get focused on where what would be next to what because we don't know where anything might be? Anything goes to planning commission.

Ms. Fishman – Turntable and south area. How should the turntable function? Connection to main line stay in place? What kind of land uses in the south area?

Ms. Freed – 2926 are here, spent 20 years bringing it to life. It has to come home, which is the Rail Yards, and turntable is required for that and needs to be functional and connected to the main line.

John Roberts, NM Steam Locomotive and Historical Society – We have a vested interest in 2926 being at the Rail Yards, need the turn table for that to happen. Public display, possible excursions, possible other entities in the nation to join use for rail heritage and tourism use, have letters of intent. Cultural, museums, cultural activities, public use. Turn table to operate and be connected to the main line.

Councilor Benton – Present site you have always seen as an interim site – limitations with respect to public use. Rail Yards and turntable would allow them to get more people there for activities. Site has worked for restoration but need to move for more public use/activities. Old parcelization lists this area for railroad related facilities, cultural.

Ms. Morris – Parcel 1 that includes the turntable is big, includes almost all of the southern portion of the site, very large. Includes large area quite a distance clear of the rail lines that previously had an easement and goes all the way up to the south platform. Listed as parking only in the current master plan. If portion of the roundhouse is rebuilt, turntable functioning, clear areas, there will still be a lot of area left over. What are the other thoughts or uses for that portion of the site?

Councilor Benton – The fact that it is only 3 uses plus parking is strange. Outside of recognizing special uses, isn't it the converse that the rest of the site is not anticipated for rail uses outside of a museum? Actual rail operations would be limited to this area. I would think maybe take out the parking. We shouldn't be ruling out other uses.

Mr. Strozier – Seems like as it relates to this particular portion of the Rail Yards, we need to make very clear the importance of functioning and access to the rail line, without constraining what other possible uses might go around that area, make sure we maintain flexibility.

Ms. Freed – Yes. We can't take the heart out. When we start putting train cars and doing excursions, there's not a lot of space.

Ms. Chavez – Trains that come in, will they be permanently parked there?

Ms. Freed – Could be both, could also do excursions. Six are interested.

Ms. Chavez – That's a lot, concerned about noise, would need to be mitigated.

Sen. Ortiz y Pino – Does the turntable need work in order to function or is it functioning now? Who would do the work?

Ms. Morris – Believe it is functioning; even though BNSF easement is gone, they are still use it.

Locomotive Society – Have done some looking at it. Would have to be checked out to make sure it could handle it, probably new ties, engine that runs it has been vandalized. These things are solvable. Our engine is not going down there to be a static display. We want it moving, the public wants it moving.

Councilor Benton – The type of activity to address Dorothy's question, it would not be daily, it would be sporadic.

Sen. Ortiz y Pino - Leba mentioned possibility of acquiring property south of there. How would that impact the use of this?

Locomotive Society and Ms. Freed – No problem.

Councilor Benton – The City has always kind of had its eye on that property south of the site, land going down to Cesar Chavez is sort of "left over" and not available at time we purchased the site. Potential developer might want to buy it and it could help their project.

Mr. Strozier – Thinks the issues with it that the senator brought up can be addressed.

Rep. Garcia – For the turntable, are we looking at the City coordinating the effort to make that a fully functional space? Why are we waiting in terms of not fully developing the turntable and other elements that go with that? Does the City not have a coordinator working with all of these elements?

Councilor Benton – Excellent question, agree we need to get an answer to that. The Administration has shown a commitment to the site. Providing clarity in the plan will help the admin and the interest in that part of the site to come up with a proposal for a public/private partnership, use of that specific part of the site.

Ms. Fishman – Interim land uses. How long should they be allowed? Should there be a limit? Restrictions on interim uses?

Councilor Benton – No discussion of the interim uses in the plan now, but they are going on. One important one is the Rail Yards Market; everyone acknowledged is beneficial to the site, appropriate for the site, somewhat movable, doesn't need to stay exactly where it is today. In a historic building now, doesn't have any ownership of that, but a really important interim use that we need to have a place for. It's also been a really compelling site for filming. Lot of the reason is that it's a sort of dystopian looking place right now. City has been collecting money this year to use most of the site. A festival outside of filming? At the Boiler Shop and Tender Repair, people are proposing a big art show. Appropriate interim use.

Mr. Strozier – Spectrum issue like land uses. Allowing flexibility and recognizes that these uses such as the Market are important to getting people to the site. If the goal is to allow flexibility, probably appropriate to add discussion of that in the master plan.

Ms. Armijo – Only concern in South Broadway is the noise level.

Councilor Benton – Important point. The Blacksmith Shop was rented out for weddings, quinceneras, music was played and out of control. Special events permit – somewhat land use related, somewhat operations related.

Ms. Morris – In terms of interim uses, the special event permits outside of filming are limited to the Blacksmith Shop and north area, now that the Flue Shop has a CO and other spaces will be available, there will be a lot of interest and demand.

Councilor Benton – Will that still require a special events permit?

Mr. Rembe – With permits, if there is a problem for the neighborhood, can they go to the department and make changes to permit, such as when amplified noise is allowed.

Councilor Benton – Yes, but sometimes its hard to control what goes on. Something like the market having to get a permit each time is absurd, it's a pretty complicated process. Maybe establish a special process for this site?

Mr. Strozier – We can look at that process and set parameters that are critical to the adjacent neighborhoods and incorporate that into the master plan.

Councilor Benton – I think it will be important to have some rules for neighborhood protection.

Ms. Chavez – Need to look at decibel limits because those buildings amplify sound.

Councilor Benton – Should we have a list?

Ms. Fishman – I think it's useful to have a list, and if a use comes up that not on the list, then there is a special process for that.

Mr. Strozier – Some uses are incorporated into the IDO as temporary uses. Agree list would be helpful.

Ms. Chavez – Should be able to use space until such time that a development contract is signed for that space.

Sen. Ortiz y Pino – Be clear that any agreements for a temporary use should be limited a year at a time, shouldn't sign any more than one year. Year at a time, renewable gives us maximum protection for the future.

Councilor Benton – Good point. Still flexibility for a use to move around on the site. If determined to be an impediment or there are problems, we would want to revisit on a regular basis.

Ms. Chavez – There should be a restriction that it doesn't cause pollution or harm to the neighborhood. Car show revving engines loud and exhaust.

Ms. Morris – We will be coming back for the August 3 meeting. Please feel free to reach out to us with any questions, concerns, comments.

Councilor Benton – Allowing public comment. Any at this time?

Alaska Piper, Rail Yards Market – We're curious how a project moves beyond interim use into permanent use – Market w/food manufacturing, distribution, food hall. Even a short-term lease.

Councilor Benton – What about permanent use for Market? Same as Historic Society, there is nothing to prevent a nonprofit from submitting a proposal to the city. Longer-term lease has not been addressed or anticipated in the plan.

Mr. Strozier – As far as land use, it would be allowed, some of the challenges to go through process to move from interim/temporary to permanent. From a use standpoint, it would be allowed.

Councilor Benton – haven't had a lot of discussion on the board about public ownership with leases to tenants. Nothing to preclude someone from proposing lease rather than purchase of property.

Ms. Chavez – Wouldn't that also apply to the turntable?

Councilor Benton – Yes, it could stay public ownership and leased to the society.

V. Adjourn at 10:39 am