

City of Albuquerque & Samitaur Constructs
Albuquerque Rail Yards Master Plan Community Meetings • August 23 & 25, 2012
Facilitators' Summary of Plenary Discussions

Overview and Objectives

The City of Albuquerque is working with Samitaur Constructs (Samitaur) to develop a Master Plan to guide redevelopment of the City-owned Rail Yards site in Baretas. Before major decisions are made that will affect the design of the redeveloped site, the City convened a series of three public meetings to gather comments from the community. The City made a special effort to invite residents of the Baretas, South Broadway, San Jose and Downtown-area neighborhoods to participate in the meetings, and the meetings were held in locations convenient to these neighborhoods—the National Hispanic Cultural Center on August 23rd from 6-8pm, the Baretas Community Center on August 25th from 10am-noon, and the South Broadway Community Center on August 25th from 2-4pm.

The objectives of each session were to:

- Provide background information on the Rail Yards site and project objectives.
- Introduce members of the Master Developer team, Samitaur Constructs.
- Engage the participants in learning more about the project and sharing their questions, concerns, and ideas.

Over two hundred people participated in the meetings. Over 100 people attended the Thursday evening meeting; approximately 80 people attended the Saturday morning meeting; and approximately 50 people attended the Saturday afternoon meeting.

Each public meeting followed the same agenda. Mayor R.J. Berry welcomed participants to the Saturday meetings, and Councilor Isaac Benton welcomed participants to the Thursday evening meeting. Following the welcome, Councilor Benton presented the recent history, present status, and objectives of the project. Frederick and Laurie Smith from Samitaur Constructs introduced their team and spoke of their company's background. Then the participants had the opportunity to learn more about the Rail Yards by visiting five "stations" that provided written and graphic information about: 1) historic preservation, 2) housing, 3) public uses and attractions, 4) commercial uses and employment, and 5) community connections. Members of the City staff were available at the stations to answer questions and talk with the participants about their ideas, which were recorded on flipcharts; there were also comment cards participants could complete at the stations.

For approximately an hour at the end of each meeting, participants engaged in a facilitated group discussion aimed both at recording questions and comments and, more importantly, at creating a conversation among the participants. The facilitator introduced three questions to guide the discussion:

- Where were you intrigued?
- What questions or concerns do you have?
- What are your recommendations?

Several overall themes emerged from the three public meetings:

- Iconic Space: The openness and the feeling of the structures should be preserved, especially the iconic architecture and “sanctity of the space” in the larger structures.
- Neighborhood Scale: The design for the redevelopment should ensure that the Rail Yard is part of the neighborhood (welcoming to residents, easily accessible, at a neighborhood scale).
- Space and Time Connectivity: The redeveloped site should reflect a connection to the history of the Baretas and South Broadway neighborhoods, the property, and the people who worked there; as well as a connection to other nearby amenities and resources.
- Site Accessibility: The site should be easily accessible via walkways, bicycle paths, trolley and bus service, and rail access, keeping the need for on-site parking to a minimum.
- Sustainable Design: The redevelopment should emphasize sustainable design, outdoor gardens and greenery, and interior open space.
- Neighborhood Benefit: The Baretas and South Broadway neighborhoods should directly benefit from redevelopment through access to the site, creation of community space, jobs for residents, and other forms of neighborhood investment.
- City-Neighborhood-Samitaur Partnership: Redevelopment of the Rail Yards site should be guided by a strong, ongoing partnership between the Baretas and South Broadway neighborhoods, the City and Samitaur Constructs.

This report summarizes the discussions that occurred at the end of each of the three meetings. (The report does not, however, summarize comments gathered at the stations on the flipcharts and comment cards. See the City’s report for a summary of additional feedback received.) Instead of reporting the comments in the order in which the participants offered them, this summary groups comments about similar topics. For example, the comments about site design have been clustered into a group with individual comments recorded as bullet items. Repetition of the same point in multiple bullets indicates that more than one participant voiced the same comment.

Community Meeting #1: National Hispanic Cultural Center August 23, 2012

Design of the Site

- I would like to see an innovative design that reflects the Southwest and is consistent with conservation and sustainable environmental practices.
- The Rail Yards are bigger than Barelás or South Broadway. This is an opportunity for the city to create something magnificent!
- The buildings on the Rail Yards site have iconic architecture—several have cathedral-like spaces—that should be preserved.
- Preserve the cathedral sanctity of the buildings.

Potential Uses of the Site

- The cathedral-like spaces could provide potential venues for art shows.
- Preserve the openness of the spaces—at least some of them—as an indoor civic plaza.
- It will be hard for visitors to have a sense of scale if there isn't a train engine in the space.
- The Rail Yards should be a home for the machine that was part of the communities' family.
- The Barelás ditch could be opened to create gardens and remind people of their agricultural heritage.
- The site should include places for children: for education, perhaps a library, etc.
- The Rail Yards should be an educational space for our children.
- This is a perfect site for a blacksmith school.
- The site could be a possible venue for Summer Fest.

Interim Uses

- There should be interim uses that get people back on the site while it is being redeveloped (e.g. art shows, farmers' markets). *Councilor Benton in response to this comment: The City is changing the zoning to allow interim uses on the site.*

Access and Connections

- The project has the rare opportunity to be a catalyst for connecting parks, facilities, and other destinations in the Rio Grande corridor.
- A trolley line could connect the Rail Yards to nearby destinations.
- Connection is a key to the success of this project. There needs to be access by bike and foot, access to the Zoo and BioPark.
- This site should be accessible by bike and walking paths.
- Pedestrian access should reconnect the site to the surrounding area.
- The site doesn't need a lot of parking garages. People should be encouraged to take the train.
- If museums are on grounds of Rail Yards, there should be no admission fees so that local residents of low income are not excluded.

Identity and Historic Connections

- Bringing back the ambiance of the Rail Yards would attract more people and reinforce the history and neighborhood connections. For example, there used to be a whistle that sounded at the start of the workday, at lunchtime and at quitting time. Something like this could be re-instituted.
- The work whistle should be brought back to the site.
- It will be hard for visitors to really connect with the history of the site if they don't have a sense of what the workers did in the space.
- Keep the site accessible to the community. Keep the community involved and informed, and listen to the community. This is our history where our families grew up.

Neighborhood Impacts

- Neighbors are concerned about increased traffic into and around the site.
- The redevelopment needs to strengthen the surrounding community without displacing residents because they are priced out.

Green Space and Sustainability

- The Rail Yards need to be a living space (not just a place of preservation). The site needs to be cleaned up and renovated.
- This site could provide a corridor for greenery and for farming.
- It is an opportunity to have a site that is green and lush.
- This should be a sustainable green space.
- Is there environmental cleanup (e.g. arsenic) that needs to happen before site is redeveloped?

City Investment, Project Financing, and Economic Development

- The City needs to be smart about economic viability.
- The City's investment was to purchase of the site. The City has to be a responsible steward of public funds. Public/private partnerships will need to leverage funds for the development of this project.
- What will the overall cost be?
- The redevelopment should promote jobs and revitalization.

Master Planning and Community Involvement Processes

- Are there initiatives to put site on the National Register? *(Ed Boles, City Staff, responded that there are initiatives in place. He also noted that the Historical Engineering Record has photographed the site.)*
- Will the feedback provided during these sessions be made available to the larger community? *(Kara Shair-Rosenfield, City Council Staff, noted that summaries of these conversations will be emailed to those who have signed in and will be posted on the City's website.)*

Additional Comments and Questions

- What type of business will go there? *(Tim Karpoff, Facilitator, responded by explaining that this has not been decided, and that the planning process will gradually get more and more detailed before actual businesses are decided on.)*

Five **themes** emerged during the conversation at the National Hispanic Cultural Center:

- The site, and the process of redeveloping it, should remain strongly connected to local neighborhoods.
- The site should reflect a connection to history- both to the historical use of this property (particularly the train-related aspects) and to the history of the larger neighborhood (working class, agriculture, etc.).
- Redevelopment should emphasize sustainability and include some open space.
- The site should be easily accessible to all- to children, to lower income residents- via walkways, rail, bike paths, and other modes, de-emphasizing car access.
- The openness and the sacred feeling of the structures should be preserved (there were several references to the spirituality of the site).

Community Meeting #2: Barelás Community Center

August 25, 2012

Design of the Site

- The Rail Yards should be a highly used place that is appealing to everyone. The High Line in New York City exemplifies the qualities it should have.
- The transfer table should be a community space. It could be the physical and symbolic gateway that invites the community.
- The interface between the Rail Yards and the community should be open and welcoming, so that the whole area can be integrated into one entity.
- The scale of buildings should be congruent with the neighborhood as you move into the site.

Potential Uses of the Site

- The site could include a community library to house works of local writers and community residents (perhaps including an oral history project and documents related to the development of the neighborhood). The library could also provide a meeting space for those working in arts and culture – “a place where things get started”. The Social Library in Los Angeles is a model that could be considered.
- Visual arts projects can be a generator of economic development. The Venice Biennale in Italy was provided as an example. The Rail Yards could host “Albuquerque’s Biennale.”
- The space should be used for operation and maintenance and public display of special trains. It could be a maintenance place for engines and as a space for public exhibits, such as an exhibit on the history of the railroad in New Mexico.
- The proposed development needs to be respectful of the railroad, as well as of the community. The Railroad should keep use of the Turntable.
- Is the City looking to put a grocery store downtown? (*Gabe Rivera, City Staff, explained that an RFP was developed for a grocery store. Responses are due to the City by November 1. The RFP is a public document and is available by emailing Gabe at jgrivera@cabq.gov or by calling 505-924-3356.*)

Access and Connections

- Transportation in and out of the site must be well planned, so that the Rail Yards aren’t land-locked.
- The site should be connected to downtown, the Zoo, local parks and community centers.
- Accessibility to the National Hispanic Cultural Center is critical to the success of the redevelopment project.
- There needs to be a connection that helps people to cross 2nd Street.
- A Rail Runner stop at the Rail Yards and pedestrian access would get people onto the site without the need for a lot of on-site parking.
- At some time in the future, the railroad will probably consolidate its operations in Belén. The surrounding property, owned by the railroad, could help to connect the site to other destinations in the city.

Identity and Historic Connections

- The redevelopment of the site should preserve the spirit and mixed culture of the Rail Yard workers, who were Italian, German, Mexican, etc.
- This site is closely connected to the identity of the Barelás neighborhood, which is older than the city. The City of Albuquerque should designate Barelás as the Historic Rail Yard District.
- The commitment to redevelop this significant and attractive property is a great opportunity for the community and surrounding neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Impacts and Access

- The Barelás neighborhood should consider the possibility of developing a Community Benefits Agreement with the master developer and the City to ensure that investments are made in surrounding neighborhoods without pricing people out of their homes.
- Job creation should provide employment for people in Barelás, South Broadway and surrounding neighborhoods.

Green Space and Sustainability

- This should be a sustainable project that enhances the community.

City Investment, Project Financing, and Economic Development

- If this is going to be an international attraction, redevelopment will require more City and State funding.

Master Planning and Community Involvement Processes

- Redevelopment of this site must be done in cooperation with the neighborhood.
- When will City Council approve the development plan and when will it get started? *(Tim Karpoff, Facilitator, explained that it will be five to six years before anything happens.) (Petra Morris, City Staff, provided her phone number in case people have additional questions or comments about the Rail Yards plan. Her number is 505-924-3897.)*
- The steps in this process are: 1) Agreement on the master plan, 2) Develop the details of the plan (e.g. zoning), 3) Secure financing for the plan and 4) Construction. *(Gabe Rivera, City Staff, explained that interim uses may happen within the next year.)*
- Redevelopment should be done through a partnership between the community, Samitaur Constructs, and the Railroad.
- Open sharing between the City and the community should continue in the upcoming work with Samitaur Constructs.

Three **themes** emerged during the conversation at the Barelás Community Center:

- Redevelopment should ensure that the Rail Yards is part of the neighborhood (welcoming to residents, easily accessible, at a neighborhood scale).
- Redevelopment of the Rail Yards site should be guided by a strong, ongoing partnership between the Barelás neighborhood, the City and Samitaur Constructs.
- The Barelás neighborhood should directly benefit from redevelopment (through access to community space, jobs for residents, investment in neighborhood).

Community Meeting #3: South Broadway Cultural Center August 25, 2012

Design of the Site

- The architects and developers should take a critical regionalist approach to this redevelopment. This approach would seek to preserve pieces of the past while engaging contemporary issues, promoting both aesthetics and sustainability. For example, the lighting in the machine shop should be preserved and maybe replicated. It is rooted in the region, speaks to the past and addresses a sustainable future.
- What are we doing with the Machine Shop to maintain it and get people into it?
 - It is a beautiful facility, and the Machine Shop should be preserved for future generations.
 - It could be a multi use space (e.g. for dance).
 - Definitely keep the wood block flooring.
- River walkways should be integrated into the site.

Interim Uses

- *Gabe Rivera, City Staff, explained that the Mayor is talking about interim uses on the site that could be done with minimal investment and easily disassembled. There is a desire for the site to no longer be dormant. The Planning Department is developing an RFP for safety upgrades to bring portions of the site up to code.*

Access and Connections

- Redevelopment of the Rail Yards site should include refurbishing the Guadalupe Bridge by adding a pedestrian/bike lane. This improvement would provide a link to Avenida Cesar Chavez and provide safe pedestrian/bike access along Avenida Cesar Chavez.
- Resurrect the “string of pearls” project, which would connect the Rail Yards, the BioPark, museums, Old Town, etc., by rail.
- The redevelopment of the Rail Yards is an opportunity to get rail back in Albuquerque.
- Do not consider making Broadway one lane in each direction. When the freeway is closed, the traffic is diverted to Broadway.
- As a way to get people back on the site without exposing them to hazards, trolleys could provide tours for people through the Rail Yards.

Identity and Historic Connections

- Film footage from the Albuquerque Museum could show what the buildings looked like and how the space was used. This will help people to understand what we are asking them to buy into.

Neighborhood Impacts and Access

- Affordability of workforce housing on the Rail Yards site should be determined by considering the income levels of the surrounding neighborhoods, rather than using [broader] City or County income levels to determine affordability.
- A Community Benefits Agreement could be developed to ensure benefits to the community. *(Tim Karpoff, Facilitator, noted that the Barelás neighborhood also discussed this possibility.)*

- Scholarships, both high school and college, should be provided for students in the South Broadway and Baretas neighborhoods.

Green Space and Sustainability

- Facilities for green development should be incorporated into the redevelopment of the Rail Yards (e.g. solar panels).
- Redevelopment of this site may result in a concentrated queuing of trains south of the site, which would cause pollution for certain parts of the neighborhood. There should be a mandate that the railroad use electric engines in certain parts of the corridor to prevent pollution.
- A solar-powered exhaust system could minimize pollution.
- Solar panels on the roofs of the Rail Yard buildings could provide power to surrounding homes.
- Local residents can smell and taste the pollution that comes from the Rail Yards site every day. Steps should be taken to clean up the buildings and remove graffiti.
- A green belt should be constructed first—with lights and trees and without pollution.

City Investment, Project Financing, and Economic Development

- How can we ensure that the jobs that are created really provide a living wage to local residents?
- A cooperative kitchen should be included on the site.
- When will we see a return on our investment? *(Tim Karpoff, Facilitator, explained that this question could not be answered at this time.)*

Master Planning and Community Involvement Processes

- The design and redevelopment process should consider seven generations into the past and seven generations into future.
- The master developer should consider hiring a local architect. *(Tim Karpoff, Facilitator, clarified that there are local architects on the master developer team.)*
- A resident to the audience: “Keep coming to these meetings. Things are getting done. Don’t get discouraged.”
- There should be materials and meetings in Spanish to encourage greater community involvement.
- Will there be additional meetings for local businesses? *(Kara Shair-Rosenfield, City Council Staff, explained that mailings were sent to all property owners, residents and to all sites with invitations to these meetings. If people have additional comments or questions, they can contact Petra Morris at 505-924-3897 or pmorris@cabq.gov)*
- When will people be able to access the site? *(Gabe Rivera, City Staff, explained that he will be meeting with Risk Management staff this week to discuss access. If anyone has questions, they can contact him at jgrivera@cabq.gov or 505-924-3356.)*

Two **themes** emerged during the conversation at the South Broadway Cultural Center:

- Redevelopment of the Rail Yards should carefully consider impacts on surrounding neighborhoods and should provide improvements to those neighborhoods (greater access, less pollutions, green space).
- Green building and sustainability should be key components of redevelopment.