

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Transportation, Sustainability, & Infrastructure Policy Review Committee  
**From:** Gabe Vasquez, City Councilor - District 3  
**Date:** September 17, 2021  
**Initials:**  
**File #:** N/A  
**Subject:** El Paseo – South Solano Corridors Ad Hoc Committee Recommendations

### Purpose

The El Paseo–South Solano Corridors Ad Hoc Committee (Committee) was formed by the Las Cruces City Council in the Spring of 2020 and their scope was modified in the Fall of 2020. The Committee was tasked with reviewing City adopted policy (Elevate Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan, El Paseo Community Planning Blueprint, Infill Policy Plan) for corridor and center revitalization and for transportation linkage improvements. Additionally, the Committee was directed to explore placemaking approaches for nurturing vibrant mixed land use corridors. The Committee also expanded its geographic scope to include the neighborhoods adjacent to the two corridors.

### Membership

The Committee membership constituted a broad range of individuals from the greater Las Cruces community. Members represented various organizations and entities including the Las Cruces City Council, the Las Cruces Planning & Zoning Commission, the Las Cruces Public School District, New Mexico State University, South Central Regional Transit District, local business and property owners, and three City Councilors. The Committee was chaired by City Councilor Gabe Vasquez. Councilor Tessa Abeyta-Stuve served as the Committee’s Vice-Chair. The entire membership included:

- Tessa Abeyta-Stuve – District 2 City Councilor (Vice-Chair)
- Johana Bencomo – District 4 City Councilor
- Gabe Vasquez – District 3 City Councilor (Chair)
- Arianna Parsons – District 1 Citizen Representative
- Justin Bannister – District 2 Citizen Representative
- Joseph Fuemmeler – District 3 Citizen Representative
- Orlando Padilla – District 4 Citizen Representative
- Crystal McCaslin – District 5 Citizen Representative
- David Lynch – District 6 Citizen Representative
- Sharon Thomas – Planning & Zoning Commission
- Karen Trujillo – Las Cruces Public Schools
- Gabriel Jacquez – Las Cruces Public Schools

- Gloria Martinez – Las Cruces Public Schools
- Luis Campos – New Mexico State University
- David Armijo – South Central Regional Transit District
- Jake Redfearn – Corridor Business Representative

## **General Background**

The El Paseo and South Solano Corridors are older traditional commercial corridors located generally south of the original Las Cruces townsite. They and their adjacent neighborhoods connect downtown to New Mexico State University and lie south of

Amador/Lohman Avenues, east of S. Main Street, north of University Avenue, and west of I-25. This area is the southern half of the area covered by the Infill Policy Plan. In addition to the Infill Policy Plan, other City Council adopted community development policy plans affecting the Committee's purview include the El Paseo Corridor Community Blueprint and Elevate Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan.

The El Paseo Community Blueprint is a City adopted policy plan incorporating the key findings from two other corridor planning efforts: Picturing El Paseo and Realizing El Paseo. Picturing El Paseo was a grassroots visioning project that resulted in a corridor vision statement and recommended next steps related to transportation improvements, green infrastructure, and zoning ordinance changes. Realizing El Paseo was a facilitated review and consideration of actions to revitalize and redevelop the El Paseo Corridor. These actions focused on development ordinance modifications, building permit process changes, and potential financial incentives for the corridor.

Elevate Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan (ELC) is the city-wide policy document expressing the City's vision and values, providing development strategies for community investment and physical growth, and stating the policies and actions to create the envisioned sustainable, prosperous, and livable city of Las Cruces. Further, ELC provides policy guidance for both the El Paseo and South Solano Corridors. This direction is provided by the Future Development Program. Both corridors are defined as Mixed-use Corridor Overlay Place Types, indicating a built environment mimicking a central business district with mixed uses lining the main streets of the overlay area. Additionally, ELC provides various recommendations via its Work Program. The Work Program provides many general and specific policies and actions that when applied promote and benefit the corridors and adjacent neighborhoods. Recommendations range from adopting Mixed-use Corridor Overlay Place Type zoning and development standards to constructing transportation infrastructure improvements to utilizing strategies to address neighborhood identity and improvement.

The Committee met monthly from December 2020 until August 2021. They discussed a series of topics during this time. These topics included:

- General city-wide development vision and adopted plans,
- City land development processes,
- Financial investment and incentive tools,

- Collaborative redevelopment approaches, and
- Specific issues and conditions related to corridor and neighborhood vitality.

## **Recommendations**

The Committee held nine meetings where they reviewed City of Las Cruces adopted plans and policy related to the subject corridors, adjacent neighborhoods, and business areas. The Committee then discussed matters and issues related to the topics of each meeting. The Committee at their last two meetings discussed a full range of redevelopment strategies and actions. Based on the meetings held, information reviewed and discussed, and general knowledge concerning the corridors and neighborhoods, the Committee reached consensus on nine (9) recommendations (a more thorough summary of the Committee meetings and redevelopment strategies discussed is provided with the attachments to this memo).

### **Southern Infill Corridors and Neighborhood Strategic Focus**

#### Neighborhoods

The southern infill neighborhoods envision and strive to be a place of economic stability, wealth creation, and healthy living. They are attractive, peaceful places where people feel welcome, safe, and comfortable and are hot spots for dwelling choice, local shopping, eateries, entrepreneurship, and businesses. Increased density in these neighborhoods will support commercial development along the corridors and, also, help to address the need for missing middle and small, entry-level homes.

#### Corridors

The southern infill corridors (El Paseo, South Solano) are seen as and continue to transform into thriving transit-oriented areas where businesses, residents, visitors, and the City work together to create and maintain a place of sustainability, one that is pedestrian and bicycle friendly, and addresses the needs of all citizens.

## **Recommended Actions**

The specific recommendations from the Committee included:

1. Community Development Department Role

The Community Development Department was identified to continue to provide general oversight and administrative support for redevelopment efforts focused on the southern infill corridors and neighborhoods. The Committee also recommended that a specific person in the Community Development Department be selected to oversee these projects.

2. City Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) Evaluation Program:

The Committee recommends the City establish a program to regularly identify, review, evaluate, and determine infill areas as appropriate for designation as

MRAs. Such a program would include determining blighted areas, preparation of MRA Plans, adopting MRA implementation tools (public/private partnerships, exploring tax increment financing, and creating incentive activities). Initial general areas for MRA consideration include the Wyatt/Campo area (Lohman Avenue to El Paseo Road), the El Paseo corridor (Idaho Avenue to Montana Avenue), the S. Valley Drive area (White Rose Court to La Posada Lane), S. Solano corridor (Kansas Avenue to Utah Avenue), and other areas with similar characteristics. An MRA program is also recommended to prepare redevelopment proposals for MRA Developer proposed projects.

### 3. Fiscal Resources

The Committee recommends that any funding budgeted for redevelopment projects and activities for the southern infill area contribute to MRA studies and plans, Low-Income Housing Tax Credit project applications, technical assistance studies, and similar redevelopment related efforts. The Committee also recommends that grant-funding opportunities continually be considered to support redevelopment activities including US HUD Choice Neighborhoods Initiative Grants, US EPA Brownfield Grants, and other similar grant opportunities. Additionally, the Committee recommends that capital projects located within the southern infill neighborhoods and corridors boundary area be prioritized and emphasized when rated and adopted as part of the City's Capital Improvement Program.

### 4. Virtual Redevelopment Technical Assistance Program

The Committee recommends the initiation of a Virtual Technical Assistance portal. The Committee envisions the virtual technical assistance being a part of the City's website. The dedicated webpage would include information, resources, and contacts related to adopted City Plans, GIS maps and data, permitting and business registrations, MRA designation(s), financial tools and grant opportunities, repository of City redevelopment information and efforts to date, and other resources to facilitate investment and maintenance of the corridors and neighborhoods. The Committee recommends that the portal be designed in a public-facing manner for ease of access by residents, businesses, and investors; to demonstrate the importance of the neighborhoods and corridors; and to differentiate the redevelopment activities for the area from the day-to-day operations of the City.

## 5. Building Technical Assistance Studio Team

The Committee endorsed the formation of a building technical assistance studio/team. This recommendation addresses similar matters as the virtual technical assistance recommendation and can augment and be a component of the virtual portal. The studio/team would facilitate and assist with building and zoning information and processes, speculative flex space investment and construction, pattern zone development (pre-approved building plans) opportunities, grant opportunities and management, design guideline development and use, building and site adaptive re-use assistance, property maintenance guidelines and standards application, and round tables and discussion groups facilitation.

## 6. Business Technical Assistance Team

The Committee also endorsed the formation of a business team. This team would provide a similar role as the building technical assistance studio/team but concentrate on the needs of business. This team is also anticipated to support the virtual technical assistance portal. Assistance focus would include business corridor branding, business financial assistance, grant opportunities and management, property maintenance guidelines and standards application, public private partnerships and agreements, business improvement district and agreements, round tables and discussion groups' facilitation, and financial incentive evaluation and study assistance.

## 7. Neighborhood Technical Assistance Team

The Committee also endorsed the formation of a fourth technical assistance effort focusing on the needs of the south side neighborhoods. Initial areas of assistance include neighborhood branding, grant opportunities and management, property maintenance guidelines and standards application, round table and discussion group facilitation, financial incentive evaluation and study, and other identified neighborhood assistance undertakings.

## 8. Paseos Verdes Affordable Housing and Mixed-Use Redevelopment

Last, the Committee recommendation is to endorse and support the Economic Development Department—Housing and Neighborhood Services' Paseos Verdes project. The committee supports continued due diligence to see the project initiated and completed as timely as possible.

## 9. Official Boundary Designation of El Paseo – South Solano Redevelopment Area

The Committee recommends that the City Council adopt a resolution designating the El Paseo-South Solano Corridors Ad Hoc Committee's study area boundaries for redevelopment. Further the resolution should state the City's desire to pursue plans to increase density in the subject neighborhoods in order to support more commercial activity in the corridors and to provide

redevelopment and conservation support to both residents and other interested partners. Such efforts will promote the neighborhoods' and the residents' ability to build wealth through increased housing density and greater incorporation of commercial activity, throughout the neighborhoods as well as along their mixed-use corridors. The resolution should also state the City's commitment to promoting and enhancing the southside infill area through its budgets, programs, and services. The resolution would clearly articulate the City's commitment to improve the quality of life for the residents and businesses of the area.

The El Paseo-South Solano Corridors Ad Hoc Committee requests that the Transportation, Sustainability, and Infrastructure Policy Review Committee (TSI-PRC) endorse their recommendations. The Committee also recommends that the TSI-PRC support a work session with the full City Council to discuss the Committee's recommendations.