

Aesthetic Quality of Life Task Force
of the
City of Rio Rancho

Progress Report
April 22, 2009

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Corridors	3
Improving Corridors through Aesthetics	3
Who Benefits from Improved Corridors	3
What Can Be Done to Improve Corridors	3
Palette	3
Points of Entry	3
Gateways	4
Thorough Ways	4
Definition of Corridors	5
Neighborhoods	6
Improving Neighborhoods through Aesthetics	6
Who Benefits from Improved Neighborhoods	6
What Can Be Done to Improve Neighborhoods	6
A Community through Continuity	6
Parks as a Gathering Place	7
Weeds	7
Graffiti	8
Where to Go, What to Do – Rio Rancho’s Entertainment Areas	9
Traveling from Point A to B – Transportation Alternatives	9
Environmental Court – Enforcing the Health and Safety of the Community ..	10
Commercial Vehicles in Residential Neighborhoods	10

Introduction

Communities that are visually appealing create a sense of place for residents, one they can be proud of. This in turn creates an quality of life environment that non-residents will want to be part of, i.e. visitor spending, potential home buyers and entrepreneurs.

The task force has made initial determinations outlining major issues facing the aesthetic quality of life of the City. This report will summarize this outline and provide the blueprint for ongoing determinations for the overall business plan.

This scope of work has been divided into two categories: Corridors and Neighborhoods, each being distinctive in its purpose in the Community.

Improving Corridors through Aesthetics

The City is lacking definition and commitment to a sense of place. Sense of place is created by an overall cultural palette for our Community. Corridors are the front porch of Rio Rancho. They are boundaries to be built on unique, well maintained palettes.

Who Benefits from Improved Corridors

Neighborhoods and their residents, businesses and visitors benefit.

What Can Be Done to Improve Corridors

Corridors guide everyone to their destination and make a lasting impression. The perception of the Community is affected by road conditions, infrastructure design elements and general maintenance. A citywide Master Plan for improvements and enforceable development guidelines are imperative.

Corridors have been further defined as Points of Entry, Gateways and Major Thorough Ways.

The Task Force understands that some of the Points of Entry, Gateways and Major Thorough Ways are under the jurisdiction or joint jurisdiction of State, County or bordering Cities. However, it is imperative to create a collaboration to achieve these objectives.

The most critical issues and potential solutions are discussed in the following sections.

Palette

Situation: The City has been inconsistent in establishing and enforcing design parameters.

Solution: Master Plan - develop and enforce overall aesthetic guidelines based on establishing a unique and consistent palette to be utilized for improvement and development.

Recommended elements of the palette to include artistic structures, monuments, seasonal pole banners, landscaping, design masonry, decorative walls, etc.

Points of Entry

Situation: This important first impression is currently neutral. The City looks like every other city in New Mexico so visitors do not know that they are entering and being welcomed into the “City of Vision”.

Solution: Master Plan - design and build unique, artistic structures to be placed at Points of Entry defining the entrances to the City.

Order of Importance:

Archways – Artistic Structures

Intersection of Hwy. 550 and Hwy. 528
Intersection of Hwy. 528 and Westside Blvd.
Intersection of Unser Blvd. and Westside Blvd.

Monuments

Intersection of Hwy. 550 and NW Loop
Bosque River Park – Northern entrance
Intersection of Hwy. 528 and Corrales Road/Obregon Road
(consideration: move monuments from 528/Westside and Unser/Westside)

Gateways

The Gateways are major corridors that link the Points of Entry.

Situation: Lack of a Master Plan resulting in discontinuity and maintenance.

Solution: Improvement of existing medians and shoulders to include landscaping, designer masonry, decorative walls and seasonal pole banners.

Order of Importance:

East side Hwy. 528 from Southern Blvd. to Ridgecrest Road
East side Hwy. 528 at Industrial Park
West side Hwy. 528 from Hwy. 550 to Ridgecrest Road
West side Unser Blvd. from Southern Blvd. to Abrazo Road
East side Unser Blvd. from Southern Blvd. to Abrazo Road
West side Unser Blvd. from Westside to Southern Blvd.

Thorough Ways

Thorough Ways are the interior major corridors that link the Gateways.

Situation: Lack of a Master Plan resulting in discontinuity and maintenance.

Solution: Improvement of existing medians, round-a-bouts and shoulders to include landscaping, artwork, designer masonry, decorative walls. Seasonal pole banners at key intersections and along key thorough ways.

Order of Importance:

IMPORTANT: Southern Blvd. from Hwy. 528 to Unser Blvd. – Master Plan
North and south sides Northern Blvd. from 30th Street to Unser Blvd.
Idalia Road, Main Street, Iris Road (Idalia to PDV) – Master Plan

Exhibit I

Definition of Corridors

- a. Points of Entry
 - i. Northeast – Intersection of Hwy. 550 and Hwy. 528
 - ii. Northwest – Intersection of Hwy. 550 and NW Loop to Unser
 - iii. Southeast – Hwy. 528 and Westside Blvd.
 - iv. South – Westside Blvd. and Unser Blvd.
 - v. West - Idalia Road and City/County Line

- b. Gateways
 - i. Hwy. 528 (Hwy. 550 to Westside Blvd.)
 - ii. Unser Blvd. (Westside to NW Loop)
 - iii. Hwy. 550 (Hwy. 528 to NW Loop)
 - iv. Paseo del Vulcan (Hwy. 550 to Unser Blvd.)

- c. Major Thorough Ways
 - i. Westside Blvd.
 - ii. Southern Blvd.
 - iii. Northern Blvd.
 - iv. Idalia Road
 - v. Main Street
 - vi. Bosque River Park
 - vii. Iris Road (Idalia Road to Paseo del Vulcan, City Centre corridor)

Improving Neighborhoods through Aesthetics

Who Benefits from Improved Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods that are visually appealing create a sense of place for the residents of that neighborhood. This in turn creates an environment that people can be proud of and that non-residents (homebuyers and future City residents) will want to be a part of. More social interaction among residents, safer neighborhoods and increased property values are all potential results of creating better neighborhoods.

What Can Be Done to Improve Neighborhoods

The task force has had several roundtable discussions to determine the major issues facing the aesthetic quality of life of the residents of the City. Several specific issues that involve improving the aesthetics of neighborhoods have also been brought to the attention of the task force by members of the community and City employees. The most critical issues and potential solutions are discussed in the following sections.

- **A Community through Continuity**

In the early years of the City, development was occurring without a concept of what the ultimate goal would be. As the City has grown, development has sprung up through different developers without minimum visual standards, creating a discontinuous look throughout the City. One of the most visible parts of this discontinuity is along the east side of New Mexico 528 from Southern Blvd to Ridgecrest. Driving along this stretch of road, a visitor to the City is encountered with several different types of fences and walls, with most in some state of disrepair. This hodgepodge of fences gives the City a dilapidated look.

Solution

It is the recommendation of this task force that the City implement a minimum standard for perimeter fencing, particularly along major corridors. Fortunately, much of the existing undeveloped area will fall under a master plan or specific area plan that will provide visual standards. All new construction must conform to these standards. Where existing residences are in place, the City will need to take action by allocating monies from the General Fund to construct perimeter walls. The task force recommends that the City construct a single visual barrier along each corridor of interest that incorporates landscape and art.

Order of Importance:

NM 528--East side from Southern Boulevard to High Resort

Southern Boulevard--South side from NM 528 to Sara Road
Unser Blvd --South side from Southern Blvd to Abrazo Road
Westside Boulevard--North side from NM 528 to Golf Course Road

- **Parks as a Gathering Place**

The City has an extensive park system that provides a variety of activities. Many new subdivisions have incorporated parks into the layout of houses to provide gathering places for the neighborhoods. Excellent examples of neighborhood parks include those in the Cabezon subdivision and Northern Meadows subdivision. These parks accommodate a variety of uses because they incorporate many different features--playground equipment, picnic tables, sports fields, walking trails, community centers, etc. It should be a goal of the City to provide the same quality of parks to all neighborhoods, thus giving all residents a place to gather and be outdoors close to home.

Solution

The City should maintain all parks with the high level of service, maintenance, repair and upkeep.

- **Weeds**



Weeds are everywhere in the City and cannot be prevented. Weeds will grow on any piece of land--front yards, backyards, in sidewalk cracks and medians. Unmaintained areas with overgrown weeds give the impression of neglect. In our neighborhoods in particular, weeds are a growing problem. Most neighborhoods have homes that have become overgrown with weeds for a multitude of reasons. Current City ordinance regulates the height

of the weeds, but the problem has become so vast that it is impossible to catch all of the neglected areas all of the time.

Solution

The task force recommends a code enforcement sweep on a quarterly, seasonal basis that would entail code enforcement visiting all neighborhoods in the City and citing violators. A schedule would be set by the City whereby on certain dates, City representatives would visit certain neighborhoods, with every neighborhood receiving a visit within a calendar year. By doing this, the City can ensure that all neighborhoods are treated fairly with regards to the ordinance.

For violators who remain non-compliant, the task force recommends referring offenders to an environmental court, discussed in a later section.



- **Graffiti**

Graffiti is a problem that cities of all sizes have encountered. Rio Rancho is not immune to the graffiti epidemic. The City has taken a major step towards fighting graffiti by allowing residents to report incidences online through the "Citizen Question Forms" provided on the City website, but there is more to do in the fight against graffiti.

Solution

The task force proposes a multi-faceted attack against graffiti that includes prevention, clean up, enforcement and education. The City should adopt a stringent 24-hour removal program.

- **Where to Go, What to Do--Rio Rancho's Entertainment Areas**

Where do Rio Ranchoans go to shop, eat at a restaurant, take in a concert, dance at a nightclub or take an evening stroll with the only intent to people watch and window shop? Rio Rancho is the third largest city in New Mexico with much more room to grow, but it lacks a key component of a big city--a specific area where people can gather to be entertained.

Without specific areas defined and intended to be entertainment areas, the City will lose out on the potential tax revenue, residents will have a decreased satisfaction in the area they live in since they always have to leave the City to find entertainment, potential jobs will be lost, and Rio Rancho will continue to be overlooked as a destination. The recent Citizen Survey conducted in 2008, showed that the City is below the benchmark in resident satisfaction regarding shopping opportunities and places to work. The proposed City Center is intended to be such an area but until that area gets built up, the residents need a place to go.

Solution

Rio Rancho already has the beginnings of a good entertainment district: Southern Blvd from NM 528 westward. Several restaurants have already opened in the area and there are existing stores and shop spaces waiting to be filled, but the area needs to become more visually appealing so that people want to be a part of the scene. Special paving and lighting can delineate this entertainment district. Pedestrian friendly features can be incorporated, such as human scale buildings that are inviting, benches to rest on, and outdoor seating areas for restaurants.

- **Traveling from Point A to B--Transportation Alternatives**

According to the recent Citizen Survey, 77% of residents commute to work in a motorized vehicle alone. The consequences of this single statistic are quickly becoming apparent in Rio Rancho. There are an increasing number of cars on the road, and during commute times, traveling just a few miles could take half an hour or longer. The police department has begun targeting aggressive drivers on major roadways. Roads are deteriorating due to

increased usage. Without incorporating a transportation system, the City will continue to suffer.

Solution

The City can improve the deadlocked streets during high traffic commute times by planning for a transportation system that uses different modes of transportation. The system needs to incorporate bike trails, walking trails and public transportation. An attempt should be made to incorporate the City of Albuquerque's (COA) already extensive bus system into the City of Rio Rancho. The existing COA Cottonwood hub at Coors Bypass and Ellison Road is an excellent opportunity to link a Rio Rancho bus system to the Albuquerque bus system, thus providing better services to those who need to travel outside of Rio Rancho.

Bike trails and multiuse trails need to be more continuous throughout the City to provide safe routes to work and entertainment areas.

- **Environmental Court--Enforcing the Health and Safety of the Community**

There are many codes in the City that have proven difficult to enforce--overgrown weeds on unmaintained lots, graffiti, truck parking, blighted homes that are in need of repair. Code enforcement can only do so much with their powers such as issuing citations. When issues are passed onto the courts, they are often not as high of a priority when compared to the major issues the courts deal with on a daily basis.

Solution

The task force recommends creating an "environmental court." Many communities across the United States have created this special court to deal exclusively with issues relating to the quality of life of residents, such as the issues described in this section that Rio Rancho is dealing with. Due to the specific task of this type of court, issues such as home maintenance and repair and graffiti are given priority. Code violators will be required to shape up or pay up. Additionally, the courts will be better equipped to provide guidance to violators in case assistance is needed in bringing an issue into compliance. For example, if a resident cannot afford to repair broken windows, the court may be able to direct the resident to local aid groups.

- **Commercial Vehicles in Residential Neighborhoods**

Recently, the City implemented the current code that limits the parking of commercial vehicles in residential neighborhoods. All

commercial vehicles in residential neighborhoods must be shielded from view with landscaping or hardscaping. It has come to the attention of the task force that the current ordinance is vague in its wording and can easily be misinterpreted. Commercial vehicles continue to park in residential neighborhoods with minimal to no shielding, and although cited by code enforcement, without the backing of the judicial system, many vehicles continue to be in violation. This creates a neighborhood that is both aesthetically unpleasing and socially unpleasing. As one resident parks a commercial vehicle, another resident calls upon code enforcement to have the vehicle removed. This kind of aesthetic and social distraction has a negative impact on a neighborhood.

Solution

The current ordinance is not enforceable in its current language. The recommendation of this Task Force is to ban commercial vehicles in residential areas.

This provides continuity with surrounding communities that also ban commercial vehicles in residential neighborhoods. Our position is to be consistent with surrounding metropolitan areas.

The task force is aware of the issues that may arise with a ban, such as lack of commercial vehicle parking in the City, the right of the commercial vehicle owner to store the vehicle on one's own property, and the issue of safety of storing the vehicle off-site. Communities that have similar ordinances have areas where commercial vehicles can be stored. The task force anticipates that a demand for a location to park commercial vehicles will spur the entrepreneurship of a community member or members to provide a needed service.

Transporting commercial vehicles through residential neighborhoods is also an issue that comes with allowing commercial vehicles to park in residential neighborhoods. Residential streets are not designed to withstand a frequent load of a commercial vehicle and when residential streets are traversed by such loads, the effective life span of the road decreases.