



A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE HILAND THEATRE AND HIGHLAND NEIGHBORHOOD

**Presented to the City of Albuquerque for Inclusion in
The Nob Hill / Highland Sector Development Plan
February 2006**

Our Commitment to the People We Serve

Bernalillo County owns the Hiland Theater and the block of property on which it is located. We are concerned with the future of the Highland area both as a property owner and because of our commitment to serving the public interest. Our vision for the future of the Hiland Theater and the Highland Neighborhood is based on this commitment. A vision for the future of this area of our county should offer the most potential for the present and future neighbors, and offer a desirable destination for all of the residents in our county and our region. We believe this vision statement meets the test of public service today and in the future.

A Vision for the Future of the Hiland Theater and Highland Neighborhood

Our vision for the future may be summarized by the following description of the theater and neighborhood in the year 2030.

The Hiland Theater is the hub for dramatic and performing arts serving Albuquerque and the region, with an increasing creative contribution to our State and Nation. The Hiland Theater is a destination for persons being trained in various art forms, and for persons attending music and theatrical performances. Transportation for the Hiland Theater and Highland Neighborhood is provided by both transit and automobile. Transit, bicycle and pedestrian mobility are more common than use of personal passenger cars. When automobile congestion led to new definitions of the lowest level of service at the end of the first decade of the 21st Century, demand for transit grew and public and private providers responded. The Highland neighborhood benefited by having planned for and stimulated Transit-Oriented Development along with pedestrian and bicycle-friendly networks.

We encourage action now to enable this vision to become reality by the year 2030. We have already begun. The Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area goals include increasing the utilization of transit, biking and walking. In implementing this

goal, Central Avenue is designed now and for the future as a Premium Bus Route. (2025 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, 2003) Central Avenue is part of the Long Range High Capacity Transit System for the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area. (Long Range High Capacity Transit System, 2002) Central Avenue is also designated as a bicycle corridor. (Long Range Bikeway System, 2004) The inclusion of Highland Transit-Oriented Development, pedestrian and bicycle-friendly networks in the Nob Hill / Highland Sector Development Plan is consistent with regional plans and is another important step forward in revitalization.

Realizing the Vision

Integrating Land Use and Transit

Integrating land use and transit is key to managing the impacts of rapid growth. With a more innovative approach to planning and development, we can curb unrestrained sprawl and invigorate our existing communities as better places to live and work. These plans identify hubs of activity, and encourage a higher intensity of residential and employment growth around transit stations. The objective is to provide a pleasant, lively and safe Highland community that offers a wide range of transportation choices, to alleviate the negative impacts of and limitations of primary access by personal passenger car. These are some of the community benefits of Transit Oriented Development. (Cervero, *et. al.*, 2004)

Transit Oriented Development

Transit Oriented Development encourages a mix of land-uses, such as residential, office, shopping, civic uses and entertainment within easy walking distance from a transit station. This is typically presented as a 1/4 mile, 5-minute walk. Map 1 shows a 1/4 mile radius around the Hiland Theater. The boundary extends from Washington Street on the west to San Mateo Boulevard on the east. Map 2 shows an initial, notional version of a five- and ten-minute walking contour based on current connections. A comprehensive walking contour map would identify pedestrian impedances and access improvements. (Schlossberg, 2006) As neighborhood sidewalks are improved, for example, walking contour maps extend. Walking contour maps and related models can help us measure the pedestrian impact of Highland area improvements.

We have the beginning of a pedestrian service performance measure for public accountability. The public rightly expects more than commitments from its government. It expects measurable improvements to realize government commitments.

The mix of land uses associated with Transit-Oriented Development, combined with thoughtfully designed community spaces, plazas, and similar features, forms a vibrant village-like neighborhood where people can live, work and play. Such a village is compact in size, pedestrian-friendly in design, can be customized to offer a wide variety of housing options, with convenient access to services, jobs, and a variety of ways to get around.

Some of the land-use actions to implement Transit-Oriented Development are as follows.

- Provide an exciting mix of housing, employment, entertainment, education, retail and services. Such complementary uses make an area more rich, interesting and convenient. They also generate human traffic and activity throughout the day, making an area safer, and increasing options for consumers and transit users.
- Discourage uses that are auto-dependant, such as drive through windows, car wash, and car sales lots.
- Encourage and give incentives for uses that generate pedestrian activity, particularly at the ground-floor level such as, shops, services, and offices.
- Attract special traffic generators, such as cultural and civic anchors that act as destinations. Examples are a library, theater, museum, recreation center. For the Hiland Theater area, we propose a consistent emphasis on the arts.
- Create both vertical and horizontal mixed-use. A combination of uses on the same site makes for an interesting and more functional village.
- Encourage a mixture of housing types - for sale, for rent, market rate, affordable, senior housing.
- Preserve and protect the existing, stable neighborhood.
- Enhance existing land uses to make them more transit and pedestrian friendly.
- Locate the transit station in the heart of the development so it both generates and benefits from activity. Our vision is that the Hiland Theater would provide this hub.
- Concentrate the highest level of density closest to the transit station, gradually decreasing as development moves away from the core, creating the sense of a town center.
- Commercial development should be most intense within the core, creating an economic center. Generally, minimum densities for new residential development within a ¼ mile from station should be 25-30 (net) dwelling units per acre or greater. Between ¼ and ½ mile, development becomes less compact and should allow for 15 dwelling units or greater.
- Mixed-use buildings and non-residential buildings should target a floor-area ratio of 0.75 (net) minimum within the ¼ mile from station, and 0.50 (net) floor-area ratio between ¼ and ½ mile. This reduction in building set backs provides more space for homes and businesses, while framing the streetscape to make a more pleasant pedestrian experience.

Economic Revitalization

Transit-Oriented Development has the potential to revitalize the economy of the Highland area. National studies show that Transit Oriented Development increases land values. (Porter, 1997) Properties within a Transit-Oriented Development can experience a substantial premium – 25% or more is not uncommon - over similar properties outside of a Transit Oriented Development. (Cervero, *et. al.*, 2004) Retail and office buildings experience lower vacancy rates and increase in rental rates. A portion of the increased

premium is due to the comparative density, but a portion is also due to the desirability of these areas, and the amenity value of transit. Urban developers appreciate the value of transit. (Dunphy and Porter, 2006) Transit-Oriented Development creates a "critical mass" of activity that benefits surrounding businesses and generates significant economic activity for the community beyond the boundaries of the transit village itself.

Transit-Oriented Development can result in economic revitalization of the Hiland Theater and Highland Neighborhood. Support for success includes the following.

- Transit-Oriented Developments, like all mixed-use projects, need market, infrastructure and zoning to succeed. *Transit alone is not enough!*
- Transit-Oriented Developments are often more expensive to entitle, design, construct, finance and manage. They require more front-end equity, and often take longer to bring to stabilization. In the long term, however, they also return the highest yields to the developer.
- Transit-Oriented Developments are relatively new, can be complex, and therefore benefit from experienced designers and developers.
- Most Transit-Oriented Developments require financial participation in some form from both the public and the private sectors. Public participation in the form of infrastructure construction, tax exempt financing and/or tax increment financing is not unusual.
- Partnership in Transit Oriented Development, such as that between Bernalillo County and the City of Albuquerque in the Highland Neighborhood, is a foundational principle for success. (Dunphy and Porter, 2006)

Each Transit-Oriented Development project is unique in that it must be designed for a particular community and location. It requires a partnership between the public and private sectors and often requires a rezoning of the area. The requirements for excellent design, high quality materials, open space, plazas and public amenities drive up the private investment required. Financing can be complex, as is finding developers with experience in mixed-use villages. As a result, it is not unusual for a project to take four to seven years from conception to completion. But the long term success of these projects is nonetheless attracting more and more attention from the development community, creating more examples and unique communities. (Cervero, *et. al.*, 2004)

Recommendations

Bernalillo County is committed to partnership with the City of Albuquerque and the Highland Neighborhood. We want to make sure that this vision for the future is shared, because to realize the vision will require that we work together. We offer the following recommendations for consideration in the Nob Hill / Highland Sector Development Plan.

We recommend the Highland Transit-Oriented Development be included in the Sector Development Plan, with the Hiland Theater as the hub.

We propose discussion of a Joint Powers Agreement between the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County. The purpose of the discussion would be to draft an agreement on support of Highland Transit-Oriented Development.

With support of the Sector Development Plan, and agreement with the City of Albuquerque, re-zoning to higher densities would be appropriate. We would also identify a tax increment financing plan for consideration by the Bernalillo County Commission and the City of Albuquerque. With this coordination and cooperation, we can then issue a Request for Proposals to select a private sector development partner.

It will require patience and resolve to realize Highland Transit Oriented Development. It will call for our best effort in planning and programming. It will require leadership in our public agencies and in the community. It is, we believe, a compelling vision that is worth the best we have to offer the people we serve.

References

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