

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE

LAND USE FACILITATION PROGRAM AMENDED ZOOM MEETING REPORT

MRA Proposed Rail Trail IDO Amendments – September 20, 2023

Project: CABQ facilitated meeting
Property Description/Address: Proposed MRA Rail Trail Loop
Date Submitted: September 29, 2023
Submitted By: Jocelyn M. Torres, Land Use Facilitator
Meeting Date/Time: September 20, 2023, 4:30 PM- 5:30 PM
Meeting Location: Zoom
Applicant/Owner: CABQ MRA
Neighborhood Associations/Interested Parties: Zoom registrants (to be provided by the MRA).

Please note that this is a summary, not a transcript, of the September 20, 2023 CABQ facilitated meeting.

Background Summary.

<https://www.cabq.gov/mra/rail-trail-1>

The Rail Trail has been public information since 2021, when the City started hosting community meetings. The City has been studying the Rail Trail since 2020 and began soliciting public input in 2021. Community engagement has been and will continue to be ongoing. The City held a press conference unveiling the architectural vision for the trail on July 22, 2023.¹

This report summarizes the MRA Rail Trail facilitated meeting. The architect, Antoine Predock, lives in Albuquerque. The Rail Trail is a seven mile multi-use loop that will connect downtown destinations. Economic development, healthy recreation and cultural expression will be encouraged. Predock plans to incorporate the following auras into the trail: Placitas; Rio; Old Town; Tiguex; Sawmill; Enchantment; Industry; 66; Iron Horse; Barelax; and Umbral.²

The trail is intended for bicycles, pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles. It includes: the heart of downtown, the Sawmill District, Old Town, the National Hispanic Cultural Center, Second Street and the Rail Yards.³ The MRA and Planning Department are proposing an IDO text amendment. The amendment is intended to ensure that new development, or redevelopment, creates a pleasant environment that includes art, landscaping and rail trail access. **The City has fundraised \$39.5 million for design and construction. Actual cost estimates for the construction of the trail range from \$60 to \$90 million.**⁴ This project relates to commercial, multi-family and industrial development. It will not impact low density residential zones: RA; R-1; or RT.⁵

¹ CABQ Facilitated Meeting Report Amendment.

² Placita "small square"; Umbral "threshold".
<https://www.spanishdict.com/translate>

³ See attached photo.

⁴ CABQ Facilitated Meeting Report Amendment.

⁵ "R-1" Residential Single Family; "R-A" Residential Rural and Agricultural; "R-T" Residential Townhome.

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For projects that are more than 100 feet long, parking lots cannot occupy more than 50 percent of the trail frontage. This creates a better pedestrian environment by decreasing asphalt heat emission and the number of parked cars. Landscape buffers will resemble those of other trails. Wall and fence regulations will exclude chain link or razor wire fencing and will require a designated level of visibility between the property and the trail. Buildings in higher density areas will be limited to four stories, or 48 feet.

We're talking about reducing the required parking by 10 percent. This will encourage the use of other forms of transportation, such as those available at the Alvarado Transit Center. These regulations won't affect existing properties that are already built. This is just for new development or significant redevelopment. Our proposed regulations don't change your zoning and will not apply to single family housing. New building façades will be designed as if the rail trail is a street.

Discussion.

Ciaran Lithgow, Michael Vos and Omega Delgado were the City's primary spokespersons.

Conclusions.

Participants were interested in the planned rail trail IDO amendments and presented several questions and comments. Participant questions and comments were either directly addressed by the City or noted for future discussion.

Meeting Specifics. *Participant Questions and Comments are Italicized.* Others are displayed in regular font. *Q- Question; C-Comment; A-Answer; C- Comment.*

1. Participant Comments and Questions.

- a. *C: I'm with Palindrome and support the ten percent parking reduction. I'm concerned about the 48 foot building height limit. We own MX-M property along Central Avenue. Historically, the Planning Department has encouraged high density development at this location. We are planning a five story building and our property backs up to the Soto Avenue rail trail path. The IDO says we can't locate parking along Central and the intended rail trail amendments will limit the amount of parking behind the building. Therefore this property cannot be developed under these restrictions unless we change to a low density design.*

C: We also own property along Soto Avenue. We support this type of project and would like the City to help us develop these areas. High density development provides community value. It sounds like different IDO requirements will apply to property located either north or south of Central. I think this would be very restrictive and limiting in terms of the potential for these properties. I understand that once these provisions become part of the

https://documents.cabq.gov/planning/IDO/2022_IDO_AnnualUpdate/IDO-2022AnnualUpdate-EFFECTIVE-2023-07-27.pdf

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IDO, they're not suggestions, they are requirements. It sounds like these new IDO proposals are limiting rather than constructive.

A: We are having this discussion at the start of the annual IDO update process. The proposed rules will apply to specific properties adjacent to the rail trail corridor. We're required to hold this meeting before we submit an application. You'll receive mailed notice, as an adjacent property owner, about our public hearing and we will submit an application in four to five weeks that will go to the Environmental Planning Commission (EPC) for review and recommendation and then to the City Council's Land Use Planning and Zoning Committee. The full City Council must vote to approve the proposed rules. We don't anticipate that the process will wrap up until next spring or summer. There will be plenty of opportunities for continued comment. We will review your comments with the MRA to consider potential modifications before making our EPC application.

As you mentioned, it sounds like there are some circular difficulties with the treatment of Central Avenue as a corridor and the treatment of the rail trail. This is something that we'll certainly consider. Also, I would love to hear about your development plans at MRA. We have some incentives and would like to hear about how we can work together to make whatever development you have work. We'll be coming out to the folks in the Old Town neighborhood soon to do some community engagement along that segment as well. So I look forward to continuing to work with every property owner in the area.

- b. *Q: I was just wondering if designating something as a road has implications for who would have access to the trail and how that would affect overall design considerations and rights of adjacent property owners. It seems that a trail is something quite distinct from a road, and to have the designation as both is somewhat confusing.*

A: A road is a public right of way and is built and maintained by the Department of Municipal Development (DMD). DMD is guided by a different set of rules than the IDO. The Integrated Development Ordinance (IDO) regulates development on private property. Each applicable term has a separate meaning. The proposed IDO amendments will treat the rail trail as a street for purposes of building entrances and design.

Q: Does this mean that a building facing Central and backing Soto Avenue will be treated as having two fronts and no back?

A: Yes, that is the way it's being proposed right now. We've heard these concerns; especially with parking. What's the front, what's the back, and how do we design in two directions? I think that definitely warrants further discussion internally. If the street facing façade is the trail and that's to your rear, in some ways, it's effectively creating a second front. For the purpose of building design, you would need to provide an access door on that side and meet additional design considerations.

C/Q: But the street facing requires different windows on a certain percentage of the building. It forces you to apply specific changes and costs when you're talking about two

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fronts and no back. It's not just access. Are you talking about building design, glazing and things like that?

A: Street facing façade does involve proximity to the street, depending on the setback. If you build at Central, it's possible that only the Central side would be street facing. If you push your building back, the street facing could be the trail. So I think there's a little bit of flexibility, but it depends on the size of your site, how large the building is and what your setbacks are. But, yes, additional costs are associated with some of these design standards.

C: Also limitations on density. We're limiting the property potential because we're limiting the density. It sounds like the Central IDO is conflicting with the rail trail IDO. Can you have exceptions to certain things? Where would the Central Corridor trump the Rail Trail IDO? Are we going to be bound by two, or can we choose one?

A: If what was put forward today, for the purposes of this meeting and discussion, were adopted, you would be bound by both unless you obtained a variance as to one of the sides. I hear it loud and clear that we need to examine some potential exceptions for those properties that have the double frontage.

I just want to provide a gentle reminder to people that we're talking about regulations for adjacent private and public property. We are not here to talk about trail connections, trail users, anything having to do with the trail itself. If you have a question about that, please put it into the chat. We'll record it, and then we can definitely address it at a later time.

- c. *Q: The reference to Parks and Rec. as the responsible department for the Rail Trail is followed by a question mark. Why is this unsettled?*

A: I'm the person who put the question mark in there. Parks and Rec. usually maintains our multi-use trails. Here, our friends at MRA are planning and getting the funding for this particular project. The question mark is for internal confirmation that once this is built, will it be turned over to the Parks and Rec. department, as with our other trails? The question mark is just so that we can circle back and confirm which department is going to take on maintenance responsibility post construction.

That's correct. At the moment it seems that Parks and Rec. will be responsible for maintenance; although there might be a maintenance partnership between MRA and Parks and Recreation. That's where that question mark comes in. Internally, we need to make sure that's correct.

- d. *C/Q: I have a question regarding Soto Avenue. It's about 50 feet wide. A lot of that is a paved asphalt road, with about 15 feet of dirt on each side. Some of that includes utility easements. Based on the rail trail images, it appears to be between 10 to 15 feet wide. What happens with the rest of it?*

A: I can take that. We're still in the process of determining which side of Soto the rail trail will be on; north or south. There is the opportunity for the rail trail to utilize utility

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easements. I guess this is more of a design question than an IDO question. We're working through it and understand the right of way constraints. Generally, the trail is between 14 and 25 feet wide. We will maintain Soto as a two way street for vehicle access.

Q: You're saying that Soto will maintain vehicle access? Isaac Benton said that it would not. I'm trying to figure out who really decides.

A: My study team decides. We are working through that question now. Councilor Benton has been advised of the recommended changes to his initial suggestion for how to treat Soto.

C/Q: Coming back to your proposal, it said no vehicular traffic on the rail trail. Are you now saying that there is vehicular traffic only for locals? What kind of vehicle traffic are you talking about?

A: The trail won't take up all of Soto. There will still be a road for vehicles and the rail trail for pedestrians and cyclists.

Q: Are we certain that Soto Avenue is the choice, or is it Hollywood, or the land north of that?

A: This is getting closer to design questions. There's a study that's coming out regarding the options we're studying right now. Soto seems to be the best one, but we're still in the evaluation process. We plan to bring the study results to the community in the next few months.

2. City and IDO Priorities.

- a. *C: I have two categories to speak on. One is the missing oversight at the City, which includes MRA and homeless issues, and the vacant and abandoned issues. We've been working on several things for many years, but my first experience with Metropolitan Redevelopment is with the University redevelopment plans, and they're not good. There was a list of businesses and contact names that the City and a committee member worked on, and then the meetings stopped. We've continued asking for that list and to be a part of future meetings. It has now been almost eight months since the list was made and the meetings have stopped. So Metropolitan Development activities really need some oversight; especially this new one in the University area regarding the homeless situation. I found out yesterday that we have a 96 percent fail rate for rehousing people that come into the West Side gateway shelter. I think this is a bigger priority than a rail trail.*

Then again, we have this vacant and abandoned land. The newspaper recently included a discussion about creating a housing loan fund. We've been trying for 15 years, with three task forces, to get a vacant and abandoned land bank established. This has got to be a higher priority than a rail trail.

On this amendment process issue, we have been working since the IDO was put into place to establish the distinction between substantive amendments which affect individuals

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across the city, and textual or technical amendments. This meeting today is yet a seventh way of affecting notifications to the public, and it's just wrong. The processes have to be streamlined. They have to be adhered to. You need an impact study. You need to say who the beneficiaries are. You need to have the unintended consequences down to the individual addresses noted in something like this. This is not a way to amend our zone code. Thanks for having me here and hosting this. I appreciate it.

A: The City can address homelessness, housing and many other strategies at MRA. A citywide rail trail can also be a priority. Quality of life for our citizens and economic development for our City are administration priorities. In addition to dealing with issues of homelessness and housing on the amendment process, we are following the regulations set out in the IDO for this type of amendment.

- b. *C/Q: I'm in the Sawmill Area Neighborhood Association, and there's a proposed truck stop project at Twelfth and I-40. The application hasn't been filed yet. Does the rail trail converge on the southern tip of that property? If so, what impact will it have on the proposed truck stop?*

A: I can't really say definitively because I've not seen any site plans for that property. If the rail trail is following along the southern property line, as you describe, providing a landscape buffer with trees and vegetation would be a requirement along the edge between the trail and that proposed use. If the current zoning allows for a heavy vehicle fueling truck stop, the rail trail rules would not affect that use. It may change the design along the southern edge of the property. For instance, if it's over 100 feet long, that edge couldn't be a truck stop parking lot. They'd potentially have to reconfigure the site in response to those requirements. The requirements pertaining to the first application, will govern site design requirements for the other application.

- c. *Q: How does the Planning Department determine which amendments get this level of community discussion, and how did you afford this opportunity?*

A: These rule changes are limited in scope to properties that are adjacent to the Rail Trail Corridor, which by definition is a small area, as opposed to a citywide change. Small area regulations are subject to a special quasi-judicial hearing process. The IDO requires a pre-application meeting with affected neighborhood associations. So the neighborhood associations that are located within or adjacent to the Rail Trail alignment were notified of this meeting opportunity.

Q: What small area?

A: This is a small area IDO text amendment for the Rail Trail Corridor that is illustrated in the website map that was also shown on the screen earlier.

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3. Questions on Trail Design, Connections and Management.

- a. *Q: I am a resident of Wells Park. I am hoping that the trail includes water bottle fill stations. In my opinion, this is a major downfall of the ART project. It would have been easy to put water stations in when the initial construction project was underway. It gets hot in Albuquerque. People exercising need drinking water. I am hoping there are also restroom facilities. Thank you!*

A: We will take your suggestions into consideration when it comes to designing the trail itself. Today, we are discussing the elements that would be on adjacent private or public property.

- b. *Q: Is it expected that trail users will drive a car to the trail or will it connect to existing or proposed bike lanes?*

A: Your question is really about the trail connections and unfortunately, that is not the topic of today's discussion.

- c. *C/Q: In reference to Parks and Rec. as the responsible department for the Rail Trail. Why is that followed by a question mark? Why is this unsettled?*

A: Today we are discussing the design regulations on adjacent private and public property. Your question is about trail management and we will not be able to answer it today.

- d. *Q: Has the City considered parking for the River of Lights or Bio Park, rather than spending so much money on shuttles, transporting security, police and all of that?*

A: Again, this is not related to the IDO suggestions that we're addressing today.

These questions have been noted for future consideration.

- e. *C/Q: On the map it shows that the Wells Park segment is complete. How will we see what it's supposed to look like, or what you guys have already accomplished on this?*

A: I suggest going to the Rail Trail webpage.⁶ There is a feasibility study for the Wells Park segment between Lomas and Sawmill. I believe that plan was completed in 2021. The map shows that the spur line section between Twelfth and Lomas says, "preferred alignment," not "certain alignment." If there are areas where we have not finalized our alignment, we're going to notice the property owners on multiple alignments, so that we cover our bases.

⁶ <https://www.cabq.gov/mra/rail-trail-1>

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Next Steps.

The EPC Application will be filed in late October, 2023 for a hearing on December 14, 2023.

Meeting Adjourned.

City of Albuquerque

Jennifer Jackson	MRA Director
Ciaran Lithgow	Rail Trail MRA Lead Project Manager
Omega Delgado	Rail Trail MRA Project Manager
Michael Vos	Principal Planner
Robert Messenger	Mid-Range Planner

Participants

The list is included in the CABQ MRA Zoom Registration Log.

CABQ Land Use Facilitation

Jocelyn M. Torres	Land Use Facilitator
Tyson R. Hummel	Land Use Coordinator