

To: Albuquerque Development Commission

From: Jennifer Jackson, MRA Deputy Director

Subject: West Central MR Area Boundary Amendment: Designation of Five Parcels as Blighted for Inclusion in the West Central MR Area

MRA Case #: 2024-12

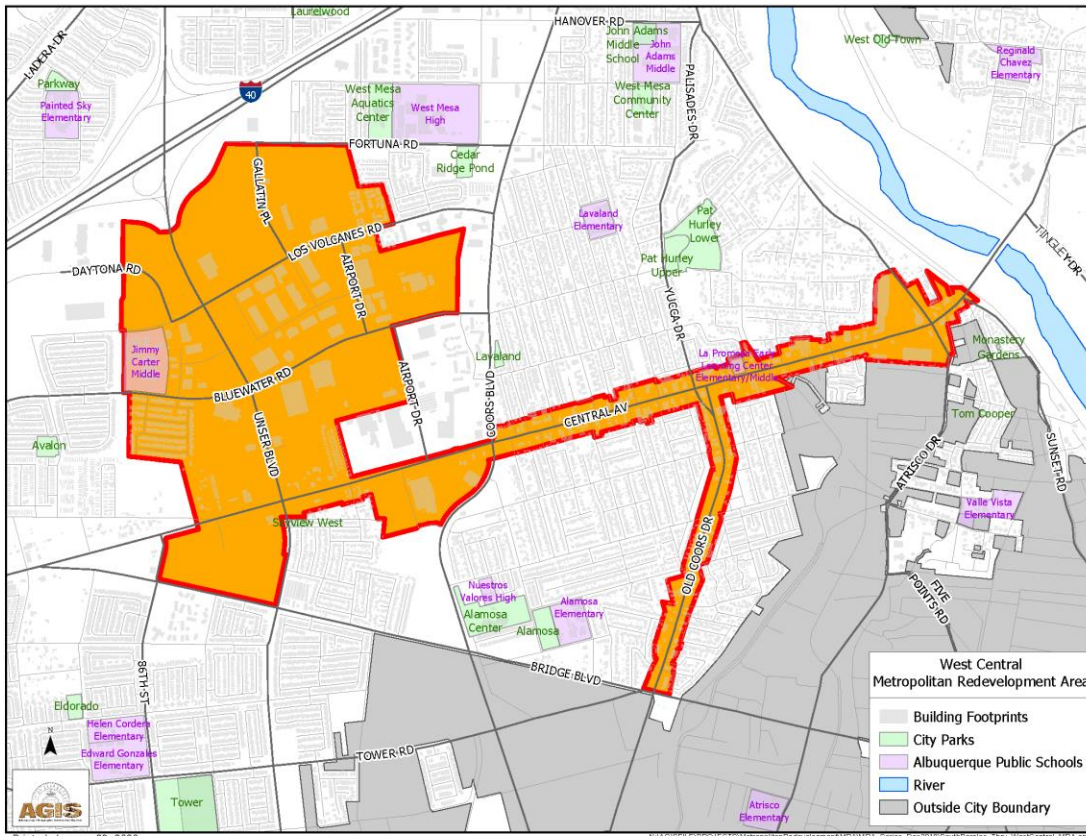


Figure 1 – West Central MRA, Current Boundaries

Executive Summary. In October 2024, Sol Housing, a non-profit housing developer, with the support of the New Mexico Land Office, submitted a proposal to amend the West Central MR Area boundary to incorporate five parcels located to the southeast of the Coors Blvd. and Central Ave. intersection. The West Central MR Area boundaries were approved by City Council on May 7, 2001, and the MR Area plan was approved on June 7, 2004. Figure 1 shows the current approved boundaries.

At the October 17, 2024 ADC meeting, the Commission chose to defer a decision for one month, with no action items requested of the MRA or the applicant, Sol Housing.

The parcels intended for designation and incorporation into the existing West Central MR Area are adjacent to each other, separated by Bataan Drive, and comprise an area of approximately 5.83 acres. The existing vacant conditions of these parcels meet the definition for designation as a “blighted area” in accordance with the State of New Mexico Metropolitan Redevelopment Code (MR Code). The application is attached to this staff report.

The designation of these parcels as blighted is for the sole purpose of incorporation into the West Central MR Area, and does not change or alter in any way the zoning of the parcels or obligate the current owners to develop or redevelop their properties. Inclusion of these parcels in an MR Area simply opens up the possibility of the MRA to be able to offer its incentives for the development of these parcels at the time it is deemed appropriate, following all laws and procedures that would apply to any future development proposal.

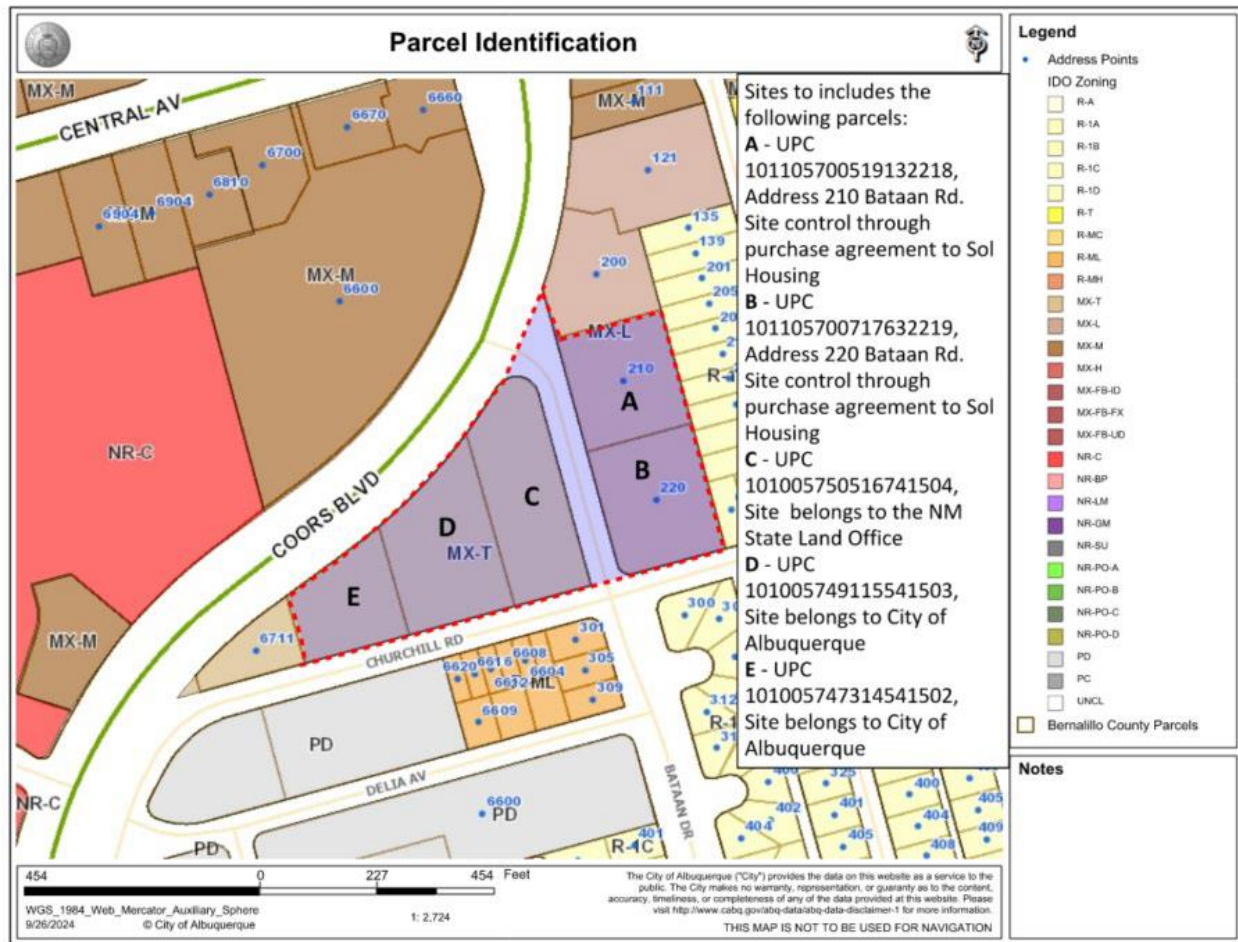


Figure 2 - Proposed West Central Boundary Change One (Coors and Churchill)

Background. The MRA received a Boundary Amendment request application on October 1, 2024 from Sol Housing, which included a letter of support from the State Land Office. The request includes five parcels located to the south and east of the Coors Blvd. and Central Ave.

intersection, as shown in Figure 2. In order for the five additional parcels to be included in the West Central MR Area, they must first be designated as “blighted areas” per the MR Code.

Based on an analysis of conditions, as evidenced by the site photos at the end of the staff report and in the attached application, MRA recommended that the addition of these five parcels south of Central Ave and east of Coors Blvd. to the West Central MR Area and Plan. The proposed boundary amendment will help the City of Albuquerque expand incentives on parcels well-suited to development that sit just outside of the existing boundary (see Figure 3).

The parcels are zoned MX-T (Mixed-Use Transition) and MX-L (Mixed-Use Low Intensity). The MX-L lots will be able to take advantage of the development height bonus from one of the parcels being partially in a Premium Transit Corridor. All parcels are located in a Major Transit Corridor and within an Area of Change (2024 Comprehensive Plan). While the parcels proposed to be included are entirely vacant, they are located near to shopping, schools, a community center, childcare, and restaurants. The parcels are located next to a low-income single-family neighborhood with a generally aging housing stock on small lots. This makes the proposed parcels well-suited for development into multi-family housing—both to help the City meet its need for new housing, and to help residents and their family members to stay in their neighborhood. Additional residents in this area will generate new spending at area businesses, and proximity to transit means that the parcels are well-connected to other parts of the City, even for individuals with limited access to a vehicle.

On October 17, 2024, the ADC deferred a decision on this boundary amendment proposal to the November 21, 2024 meeting. There were no specific action items requested of the MRA or of the applicant, Sol Housing. The details of the case have not changed in the past month and MRA’s recommendation remains the same. As a reminder, the boundary designation carries with the land, not a specific project. The ADC should not consider any planned developments within the area when determining whether the case has merit. The primary criterion to consider is whether the proposed area is blighted and underdeveloped relative to its potential based on current zoning.

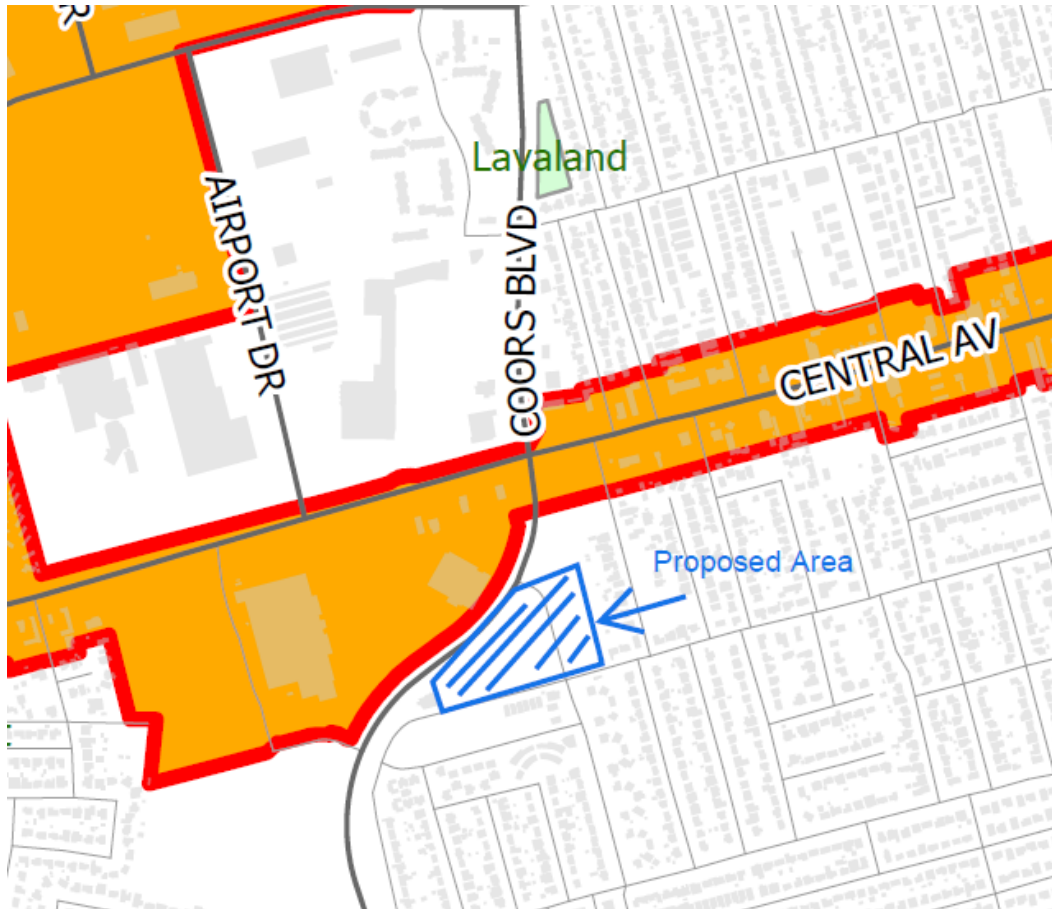


Figure 3 – Parcels in Relation to Existing MR Area

Criteria.

In order to take advantage of the State Metropolitan Redevelopment Code, §§ 3-60A-1, et seq., NMSA 1978, the City of Albuquerque passed the Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency Ordinance, §§ 14-8-4-1, et seq., ROA 1994 (“MRA Ordinance”). The MR Code requires that a geographical area be declared a “blighted area” and there be a finding that the rehabilitation, conservation, redevelopment or development, or a combination thereof, in the designated area is necessary in the interest of the public health, safety, morals or welfare of the residents before a municipality can exercise the powers conferred by the MR Code (MR Code, § 3-60A-7, NMSA 1978). The Albuquerque City Council has reserved to itself the power to declare an area blighted, through the MRA Ordinance. (§ 14-8-4-3 (A), ROA 1994). However, in creating the Albuquerque Development Commission (ADC) as an advisory body and designating it the board of commissioners for the MRA, it is appropriate for the City Council to look to the ADC for recommendations regarding the existence, extent, and eligibility of appropriate areas of the City to be declared blighted (§ 14-8-6-2 (C), ROA 1994).

The incorporation of the aforementioned parcels into the existing West Central MR Area, is based on an analysis of the existing conditions of those parcels, which meet the definition for designation as a “blighted area” in accordance with the State of New Mexico Redevelopment Code 3-60A-4(F). Vacant lots, in general, are a public safety nuance and lead to unsanitary or unsafe

conditions, as they are often subject to break-ins, squatting and other illegal activity. These parcels meet the definition of a blighted area because, being vacant lots, they contribute to unsanitary, unsafe and deteriorated conditions on the lots themselves and for the surrounding area.

Alignment with the Comprehensive Plan:

Request for MR Area boundary amendments should further the goals and policies of the Albuquerque & Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan. MRA staff finds that the proposal aligns with the following Goals and Policies:

- **Infill** (Policy 7.3.4, pp. 7-23):
 - Promote infill that enhances the built environment or blends in style and building materials with surrounding structures and the streetscape of the block in which it is located.
- **Desired Growth** (Policy 5.1.1, pp. 5-28)
 - Structure capital investment and land use regulations to direct growth to Centers, in particular those in need of public and private reinvestment.
 - Encourage the development of multi-unit, multi-story apartments and mixed-use residential buildings in...Activity Centers to increase housing density and expand housing options and affordability.
 - Encourage residential infill in neighborhoods adjacent to Centers and Corridors to support transit ridership.
 - Encourage employment density, compact development, redevelopment, and infill in Centers and Corridors as the most appropriate areas to accommodate growth over time and discourage the need for development at the urban edge.
- **Housing Options** (Policy 9.1.1, pp. 9-23)
 - Maintain an affordable housing supply in neighborhoods, in addition to creating market-rate housing, as part of revitalization efforts.
- **Affordability** (Policy 9.1.2, pp. 9-24)
 - Provide mixed-income neighborhoods by encouraging high-quality, affordable and mixed-income housing options throughout the area.
 - Encourage the development of higher-density affordable and mixed income housing in Downtown, near job centers, and along transit corridors.

Alignment with the West Central MRA Plan

While the proposed area is not near the three identified opportunity sites listed in the West Central MRA Plan (2004), the vacant parcels proposed to be included nevertheless are strong candidates for MRA designation. The proposed boundary amendment aligns with the goals and objectives in the West Central Plan as follows:

- **Economics: Goal 1: Increase the economic vitality of the MRA**

Multifamily housing is the most likely type of development to go into the new parcels, allowing for increased housing density at a key intersection, bringing more residents to Coors and Central. Thus, the proposed boundary amendment will help to support commercial businesses in the area.

Within a short distance from the parcels, there are a number of amenities, including: 1) an Albuquerque Rapid Transit stop, 2) grocery; 3) pharmacy; 4) multiple restaurants; 5) childcare; 6) a community center; 7) health clinic; and 8) a school. There is very little multi-family housing in the area, with most residential characterized by lower density single-family homes.

- **Design: Goal 1: Improve the overall appearance of the MRA**

Extending MRA incentives to the development of currently vacant parcels opens the door for an improved appearance at a busy intersection. Furthermore, MRA will be able to apply public improvement dollars to the area, further supporting an improved appearance in the area south of Coors and Central. Supporting more housing density and development in this area will fill in a stretch of Coors that is currently completely undeveloped, in spite of amenities being located nearby.

Public Notice

The MRA mailed public notice to 88 property owners and neighborhood associations within 500 feet of the parcels on October 4, 2024. This includes the Alamosa, Los Volcanes, and West Mesa Neighborhood Associations—contact information was obtained by the Albuquerque Office of Neighborhood Coordination.

Because it is planning a development within the proposed boundaries, Sol Housing has also conducted significant outreach to area property owners and neighborhood associations. Sol Housing notified neighbors and held a virtual community meeting regarding the purchase of 210 and 220 Bataan Drive and to review Sol's proposed RFP response via Zoom on Monday, June 29, 2024. Approximately 510 flyers were mailed to area residents. The meeting notification was distributed to area businesses, emailed to affected Neighborhood Association representatives provided by the Office of Neighborhood Coordination, and posted to Sol Housing's Facebook page. The recording of the Zoom meeting can be found at <https://youtu.be/2IkPe93Usqo?si=DlZqJTqxvdYvPSWw>.

On September 9, 2024, Sol Housing launched a community engagement website to provide updates and elicit feedback from the community about its proposed development. Since the site went live, Sol Housing has received 100% either neutral or positive feedback responses and 0% negative feedback responses. Sol Housing also mailed over 500 postcards to residents within ¼ mile of the site to increase traffic to the engagement website and elicit additional feedback. <https://www.aptsatbataan.com/home>.

On September 16, 2024, Sol Housing's Executive Director, Felipe Rael, attended the Alamosa Neighborhood Association monthly meeting where he brought design boards, listened to concerns, and answered questions. The meeting agenda is included in the attached application.

In the October 17, 2024, ADC meeting, members from Westside neighborhood associations spoke out in opposition to Sol Housing's proposed housing project. Their objections were largely directed at the project, not the merits of the MRA boundary designation itself.

Photos

Below are images of the existing site conditions on the five parcels. All are vacant, and are characterized by uneven ground, weeds, and trash. It is clear that vehicles cut through the lots, creating potentially unsafe conditions for people in and around the properties.







Findings.

In accordance with State Statutes Sections § 3-60A-7 and 8, staff recommends that the following findings be made:

1. One or more blighted areas exist in the proposed area, that includes vacant and undeveloped parcels and no commercial or industrial activity or redevelopment.
2. The rehabilitation, conservation, slum clearance, redevelopment or development, or a combination thereof, of the proposed area is necessary and in the interest of the public health, safety, morals or welfare of the residents of the city.
3. The City Council, the governing body of the City, after notice and public hearing as required by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Code, duly passed and adopted Council Resolution R-01-216, which designated the West Central Metropolitan Redevelopment Area and established its boundaries, and R-04-06, which approved the West Central Metropolitan Redevelopment (MR) Area Plan.
4. The proposed designation advances the goals of the West Central MR Area and Plan by creating new opportunities to increase opportunities for economic vitality and improve the overall appearance of the MRA.
5. Mailed notice was sent to the property owners of the parcels subject to designation, and to all property owners within 500 feet of the proposal area at least 10 days prior to the Albuquerque Development Hearing, which was held on October 17, 2024.
6. Notice of the proposal will be published in the Albuquerque Journal, a newspaper of general circulation in the city at least twice no less than 20 days before the full City Council meeting to review and discuss the proposed boundary amendment, and will contain a general description of the designated area and the date, time and place of the City Council meeting, where public comment can be heard.
7. No comments or objections to the proposal were received prior to the publication of this staff report, on October 11, 2024
8. Public objections at the ADC meeting on October 17, 2024 were focused on a planned housing development, which is outside the scope of this request. Boundary amendment decisions should focus on the current blight and slum condition of the proposed area and its redevelopment potential.

Recommendation.

That the Albuquerque Development Commission make a recommendation to the Albuquerque City Council to APPROVE the designation of the five parcels included in the Sol Housing's Boundary Amendment application as blighted parcels to be incorporated into the existing West Central Metropolitan Redevelopment Area and Plan, based on the findings in this staff report.

Attachments.

- A. Boundary Amendment Application
- B. Letter of Support from the New Mexico State Land Office
- C. Mailed and Emailed Public Notices