

Santa Fe/Mercantile Corridor Revitalization Strategy IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

PURPOSE

The revitalization of the South Santa Fe Avenue and Mercantile Street area has been a priority of the City of Vista for several years. One of the City's oldest, established commercial business districts, the area is currently underutilized and suffers from dated and inadequate infrastructure and a lack of private investment. The vision for the area is to create a mixed-use, destination oriented, pedestrian and transit friendly district that will be a showcase for the City of Vista.

Beginning in 2003, the City completed various activities, including the collection of baseline information, conducting extensive community outreach, developing street and streetscape alternatives, evaluating various land uses, densities, and building height limits, among other items, to develop a strategy to improve the area.

The primary purpose of the Santa Fe/Mercantile Corridor Revitalization Strategy is to encourage new private investment, assist in the revitalization of the Corridor, and facilitate the fulfillment of the vision to create a showcase mixed-use district. The basic concepts identified in the Strategy can be summarized as follows:

- Update Specific Plan 26 to provide direction regarding land use, development regulations and design guidelines.
- Complete a Master Environmental Impact Report or other environmental document to expedite processing of individual projects within the Revitalization area.
- Design and construct various streetscape improvements such as, sidewalks, lighting, signage, street furniture, etc.
- Address issues associated with portions of the area being located within a Flood Plain to facilitate development within the Revitalization area.
- Address other infrastructure needs such as upgrading water and sewer systems.
- Analyze potential street alternatives such as the realignment or elimination of Mercantile Street, the addition or modification of on-street parking on South Santa Fe, and the potential configuration of South Santa Fe.

The purpose of this Implementation Plan is to outline the steps, actions, and activities necessary to clarify, implement and effectuate the Strategy. It is envisioned that this Plan will be periodically reviewed, evaluated, and updated as needed to capture the potentially changing dynamics associated with a project of this magnitude.

ACTIONS

For discussion purposes, the following items have been placed into certain categories. However, it is intended that the Strategy and therefore by extension the Implementation Plan be considered as a comprehensive approach to the revitalization of the area.

GENERAL

Expansion of Revitalization Area Boundary

The original Revitalization Area boundary generally extended along Santa Fe Avenue from Orange Street to just south of Escondido Avenue. This Implementation Plan would expand the boundaries to better address current needs and opportunities. Additional area added would include all of the historic Downtown extending east to Citrus Avenue, additional area on the north side of Vista Village Drive from the Transit Center to Camino Patrice, the area along Escondido Avenue to the railroad tracks, and the area along South Santa Fe extending south of Postal Way. This expansion would allow the City to focus its efforts where they are most needed. Specifically, this proposed expansion gives the City greater ability to connect South Santa Fe with the new Sprinter stations at Escondido and Vista Village Drive, coordinate development along South Santa Fe with that in the historic downtown, and take greater advantage of the proposed expansion of the redevelopment project area. (See Exhibit A for a Map of the Revitalization Area Boundary)

Naming/Branding of the Revitalization Area

To develop a new sense of identity for the area, it is proposed to name the area “Paseo Santa Fe” or other descriptive moniker. This moniker would be used for marketing and promotional purposes, on way finding signs and banners, and as mentioned to create a new sense of identity for this area. Potentially this section of South Santa Fe Avenue could be renamed to reflect the new district.

PLANNING

Update to Specific Plan 26

Specific Plan 26 is a planning document that establishes land use, development regulations and design guidelines. Originally adopted in 1995, Specific Plan 26 is outdated, obsolete and inadequate to address current conditions within the Revitalization area. The proposed update to Specific Plan 26 will expand the area covered by the Specific Plan to include all of the area included in the proposed Santa Fe/Mercantile Corridor Revitalization Area, increase allowable heights and densities, evaluate and modify the allowable uses within the area, impose new parking standards based on the proposed mixed-use, transit-oriented character of the area, and develop new design/streetscape/land use guidelines.

As envisioned in the Strategy, it is proposed that residential densities be increased to allow for 40 dwelling units to the acre, that maximum building heights be increased to allow for buildings up to 50 feet in height with an allowance of an additional 15 feet for architectural elements subject to approval by the Planning Department.

It is anticipated that work to update the Specific Plan will begin upon adoption of this Implementation Plan and take approximately 4 - 6 months to complete.

Parking and Transit Plan

It is recommended that the Specific Plan establish parking standards within the Revitalization area that recognize the district's proximity to public transit, its proposed pedestrian nature, and its mixed use character. It is anticipated that commercial uses will be required to provide 1 space per 500 square feet, which is consistent with the current Specific Plan standard, and that residential units would require one space per unit. In addition, it is proposed that greater consideration be given to shared parking and offsite parking arrangements.

In addition, while the update to Specific Plan 26 will address parking requirements from a development standpoint, a Parking and Transit Plan will be developed for the area to facilitate the use of public transportation and the effective utilization of parking by the general public, employees, residents and other visitors to the area.

Environmental Compliance

Upon adoption of this Implementation Plan, an environmental document which will comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) will be prepared and certified to serve as the master environmental document for the area. This action will allow future development projects to proceed with an expedited environmental review schedule, thus shortening the project entitlement process by often more than a year and making the area more attractive to private investment. It is anticipated that it will take 3 - 6 months from completion of the update to Specific Plan 26 to complete and certify the environmental document.

FLOOD PLAIN

Removal from Flood Zone

One of the major impediments to private investment and development within the Revitalization Area is the fact that a large portion of the area lies within a 100 year flood plain. If not addressed, this situation essentially precludes significant development within the area.

To address this problem, the City has contracted with Tory Walker Engineering (TWE) who prepared an analysis of the flood zone within the Santa Fe/Mercantile Corridor

Revitalization Area to identify the extent of the flood elevations, affected properties, and possible improvements that could be implemented to reduce flood elevations within the corridor to levels which would effectively remove the area from the flood zone. A copy of this analysis (Drainage Study) is attached as Exhibit B. This analysis identified two possible alternatives.

The first alternative, described in the report as Alternative A, would require the construction of a regional detention basin upstream of the S. Santa Fe project area, improvements to the existing storm drain infrastructure in the vicinity of S. Santa Fe Avenue (e.g., upsizing existing pipes and providing some new connection points to the underground system), and modifying the existing Brengle Terrace detention basin. This alternative would leave the existing underground storm drain box culvert under Mercantile Street in place, which would require an access easement over the storm drain and would limit development within the area of Mercantile due to the location of the existing storm drain system. Implementation of this alternative is estimated to cost approximately \$2.8 million, plus the cost of acquiring additional land for the construction of the detention basin.

The second Alternative, described in the report as Alternative C, would require the relocation of the main underground storm drain culvert from Mercantile Street to a location adjacent to the NCTD railway, as well as construction of a regional detention basin upstream of the project area and improvements to the Brengle Terrace detention basin. This alternative would shift the storm drain infrastructure away from Mercantile, thereby allowing new development within the area of Mercantile and creating deeper lots for development between South Santa Fe Avenue and the NCTD right-of-way. Implementation of this alternative is estimated to cost approximately \$11.1 million, plus the cost of acquiring additional land for the construction of the detention basin.

Either of these alternatives would allow for the revision of the FEMA Flood Maps, effectively removing the area from the flood plain. The major difference between the two alternatives is that one requires constructing additional new storm drain infrastructure to relocate existing facilities outside the Mercantile Street right-of-way.

It is recommended that the City Council/Commission pursue the first alternative primarily due to its substantially lower cost. Staff believes that the impacts to potential development that result from leaving the existing storm drain facilities within the Mercantile Street right-of-way can be mitigated through project design.

The specific steps required to address this issue include the following:

- Accept the Drainage Study prepared by Tory R. Walker Engineering which recommends various storm water improvements which will allow for revisions to the FEMA Flood Zone Maps to remove the area from the flood plain
- Select a preferred alternative – staff recommendation is to approve Alternative A which does not relocate existing facilities from the Mercantile Street right-of-way.

- Authorize an amendment to the contract with Tory Walker Engineering for additional work including preparing and processing a Conditional Letter of Map Revision (CLOMR) through FEMA – (3 - 12 months)
- Acquire the land required for construction of a detention basin.
- Design and construct the required infrastructure improvements necessary to reduce surface flow to South Santa Fe Avenue. (3 - 24 months)
- Once the CLOMR is approved development can occur with flood insurance.

TRAFFIC CIRCULATION

Travel Lanes

To enhance the pedestrian environment and create a safer, but more active street level, consideration shall be given to reducing the number of traffic lanes on South Santa Fe Avenue from four to two between Main Street and Escondido Avenue. Although today South Santa Fe Avenue is frequently used by vehicles passing through Vista, this change is intended to create an environment where drivers will have greater reason to stop in the revitalization area.

Preliminary staff analysis indicates that this change will greatly advance the Plan's goals, and that the surrounding streets should provide viable and acceptable alternatives for vehicular traffic. Additional traffic analysis and technical studies will need to be completed prior to implementation.

On-street Parking

To support retail and commercial development in the area, angled on-street parking will be created along South Santa Fe Avenue. By reducing the number of traffic lanes, on-street parking can be accommodated within the existing South Santa Fe Avenue right of way, eliminating the need for costly acquisition of additional right of way. This on-street parking will be one component of a parking and transit plan to be developed for the area.

Roundabout (Traffic Circle)

Development of a roundabout or traffic circle near the current intersection of South Santa Fe and Guajome shall be considered. If feasible, this element will further enhance the pedestrian environment, create a signature element within the corridor, provide a measure of traffic calming and potentially accommodate the proposed Memorial Park.

Preliminary staff analysis indicates that this change will greatly advance the Plan's goals, and that the surrounding streets should provide viable and acceptable alternatives for vehicular traffic. Additional analysis and technical studies will need to be completed prior to implementation.

Closure and removal of Mercantile Street

To create additional design and development opportunities, Mercantile Street will be closed to general vehicular traffic. Access to existing businesses and parcels will be maintained until no longer required. Ultimately, the former Mercantile Street area will be converted to an open space area that could accommodate pedestrian walkways, open space uses, and limited vehicular access to buildings and parking to complement the higher intensity development envisioned for the area.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Memorial Park, Rail Trail, and Open Space

Essential to creating a sense of place within the district will be areas of open space to complement and offset the high density, intensive development envisioned. Two specific features of this Plan include the development of a Memorial Park and the development of the Inland Rail Trail. In addition, proposed developments will be required to provide areas of open space in the form of plazas and courtyards, including a combination of both hard and softscape features.

A site for a Memorial Park located at Guajome and Mercantile Street has been generously donated to the City of Vista. It is anticipated that this park will be an integral part of the revitalization of the area and serve as a community gathering space. To increase the parks profile and to create greater planning and development options, discussions have been held with the donor about possibly relocating the park site from its original proposed location, to other potential locations such as within the roundabout or along the west side of South Santa Fe across from Broadway. In concept, the donor agrees that the park site could be relocated.

The Inland Rail Trail will eventually extend throughout North San Diego County along the Sprinter rail line. It will provide opportunities for families and individuals to walk, jog, or bike on an improved trail adjacent to the railroad tracks.

Mercantile Street Easement

In order to accommodate the retention of existing storm drain infrastructure, pending the proposed closure and removal of Mercantile Street, it is required that an access easement approximately 20 feet wide be maintained. No structures would be allowed to be built within this easement; however structures may be permitted to bridge over the easement provided they maintain a clearance of at least 14 feet.

It is envisioned that this easement will be utilized as part of the open space element within the Revitalization area and that it will create additional design and development opportunities.

Relocation of Skate Park

As part of the City's Civic Center expansion, it has become necessary to relocate the existing skate park currently located adjacent to City Hall and the Library. In order to make more efficient use of the proposed detention basin, which as discussed previously is required to address storm water issues, staff has begun to explore the possibility of co-locating the skate park and detention basin. While this concept is in the early development stage, staff has confirmed that it is feasible and appears to present a viable opportunity for the relocation of the skate park.

STREETSCAPE AND DESIGN

A major component of the Revitalization Strategy is the installation of public infrastructure such as streetlights, sidewalks, and other street furniture such as benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, and planters

Sidewalks

The Revitalization area will be characterized by wide sidewalks (approximate 18 ft. width) appropriate street trees, planters, and enhanced paving such as exposed aggregate, brick, or other upgraded treatment. This assumes a two lane street section through the project area.

Outside Dining

A portion of the sidewalk area will be available for use as sidewalk cafes associated with coffee shops, restaurants, and other establishments.

Hanging Planter Boxes

As a design element to create ambiance and bring vibrant color to the district, it is proposed that hanging planters will be installed throughout the Revitalization area. Establishment of a maintenance district or other funding mechanism will be necessary to address on-going maintenance.

Streetlights

Streetlights will be ornamental and integral to the approved street theme and palette. The streetlights may support the Hanging Planter Boxes identified above.

UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Storm Drain, sewer and water system upgrades will be completed. The schedule for completion of these improvements has not been determined at this time.

Overhead Electrical and any other overhead facilities will be undergrounded through the development of the area.

ACQUISITION

The Redevelopment and Housing Department, on behalf of the Commission, will immediately begin to develop a plan to acquire needed parcels for the redevelopment of the Corridor.

PROGRAMMING AND ATTRACTION OF USES

The Redevelopment and Housing Department on behalf of the Commission will immediately begin to identify the most desirable uses and amenities and begin efforts to secure those uses.

The Redevelopment and Housing Department on behalf of the Commission anticipates that it will issue several tightly focused Requests for Proposals to solicit private development partners to redevelop the Corridor.

Exhibit A – Map of Revitalization Area

Exhibit B – Drainage Study

Exhibit C – Summary Schedule

Summary Schedule of Required Actions

Item	Start	Finish	Duration	Lead
Expand Revitalization Area	11/27/07*	11/27/07*	N/A	City/CDC
Update Specific Plan	11/27/07*	05/08	6 months	City/Consultant
Flood Plain (CLOMR)	11/27/07*	10/08	12 months	City/TWE
Flood Plain (Improvements)	11/27/07*	01/09	14 months	City
Environmental Document	5/08	11/08	3 – 6 months	City/Consultant
Property Acquisition	01/08	N/A	N/A	CDC
Issue Requests for Proposals	06/08	N/A	N/A	CDC
*Date of CC/CDC approval				