City of Las Cruces®
PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE

Council Action and Executive Summary

Item # 9 **Ordinance/Resolution#** 14-141

For Meeting of _____ (Ordinance First Reading Date) **For Meeting of** March 3, 2014 (Adoption Date)

Please check box that applies to this item:
☐ QUASI JUDICIAL ☒ LEGISLATIVE ☐ ADMINISTRATIVE

TITLE: **A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING THE FINAL DOWNTOWN CHARRETTE REPORT.**

PURPOSE(S) OF ACTION:

Accept Downtown Charrette Report.

COUNCIL DISTRICT: N/A		
Drafter/Staff Contact: Andy Hume	**Department/Section:** Community Development / Planning & Neighborhood Services	**Phone:** 528-3048
City Manager Signature:		

BACKGROUND / KEY ISSUES / CONTRIBUTING FACTORS:

The current Downtown Revitalization Plan was adopted in 2004. Since then, many projects and programs have been completed in the downtown area. The most notable ones are the reopening of Main Street, the adoption of the name and logo for Main Street Downtown, and the creation of the Tax Increment Development District.

Because the current plan is 10 years old, a wide variety of downtown stakeholders, City staff, and interested citizens participated in the downtown charrette to offer ideas and strategies to update the plan. The charrette was held October 7-11, 2013. The project consultant, PlaceMakers, provided the attached report that includes an analysis of the charrette and a list of tasks to continue downtown redevelopment. The draft report has been available in various formats for public and staff review since January 21, 2014.

Once the charrette report is accepted, it will be the basis for an update of the Downtown Revitalization Plan which staff will bring to Council at a future meeting.

SUPPORT INFORMATION:

1. Resolution.
2. Exhibit "A", Downtown Charrette Report.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

Is this action already budgeted?			
N/A	Yes	☐	See fund summary below
	No	☐	If No, then check one below:
	Budget Adjustment Attached	☐	Expense reallocated from: _____
		☐	Proposed funding is from a new revenue source (i.e. grant; see details below)
		☐	Proposed funding is from fund balance in the _____ Fund.
Does this action create any revenue?			
N/A	Yes	☐	Funds will be deposited into this fund: ____ in the amount of $_____ for FY__.
	No	☐	There is no new revenue generated by this action.

BUDGET NARRATIVE

N/A

FUND EXPENDITURE SUMMARY:

Fund Name(s)	Account Number(s)	Expenditure Proposed	Available Budgeted Funds in Current FY	Remaining Funds	Purpose for Remaining Funds
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES:

1. Vote "Yes"; this action will accept the final Downtown Charrette Report.
2. Vote "No"; this action will deny acceptance of the final Downtown Charrette Report. This action will delay an update of the Downtown Revitalization Plan.
3. Vote to "Amend"; this action could modify the Resolution and delay an update of the Downtown Revitalization Plan.
4. Vote to "Table"; this action will delay an update of the Downtown Revitalization Plan.

REFERENCE INFORMATION:

1. N/A

RESOLUTION NO. 14-141

A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING THE FINAL DOWNTOWN CHARRETTE REPORT.

The City Council is informed that:

WHEREAS, the current Downtown Revitalization Plan was adopted in 2004 and is about 10 years old; and

WHEREAS, many projects and programs have been completed, including the reopening of Main Street, the adoption of the name and logo for Main Street Downtown, and the creation of the Tax Increment Development District; and

WHEREAS, downtown stakeholders, City staff, and many interested citizens participated in the downtown charrette held October 7-11, 2013; and

WHEREAS, the attached report includes an analysis of the charrette and a list of tasks to continue downtown redevelopment; and

WHEREAS, once accepted, the attached report will be the basis of an update to the Downtown Revitalization Plan.

NOW, THEREFORE, Be it resolved by the governing body of the City of Las Cruces:

(I)

THAT the Downtown Charrette Report as shown in Exhibit "A," attached hereto and made part of this Resolution, is hereby accepted.

(II)

THAT City staff is hereby authorized to do all deeds necessary in the accomplishment of the herein above.

DONE AND APPROVED this _____ day of _____20___.

APPROVED:

_____
Mayor

ATTEST:

_____
City Clerk

(SEAL)

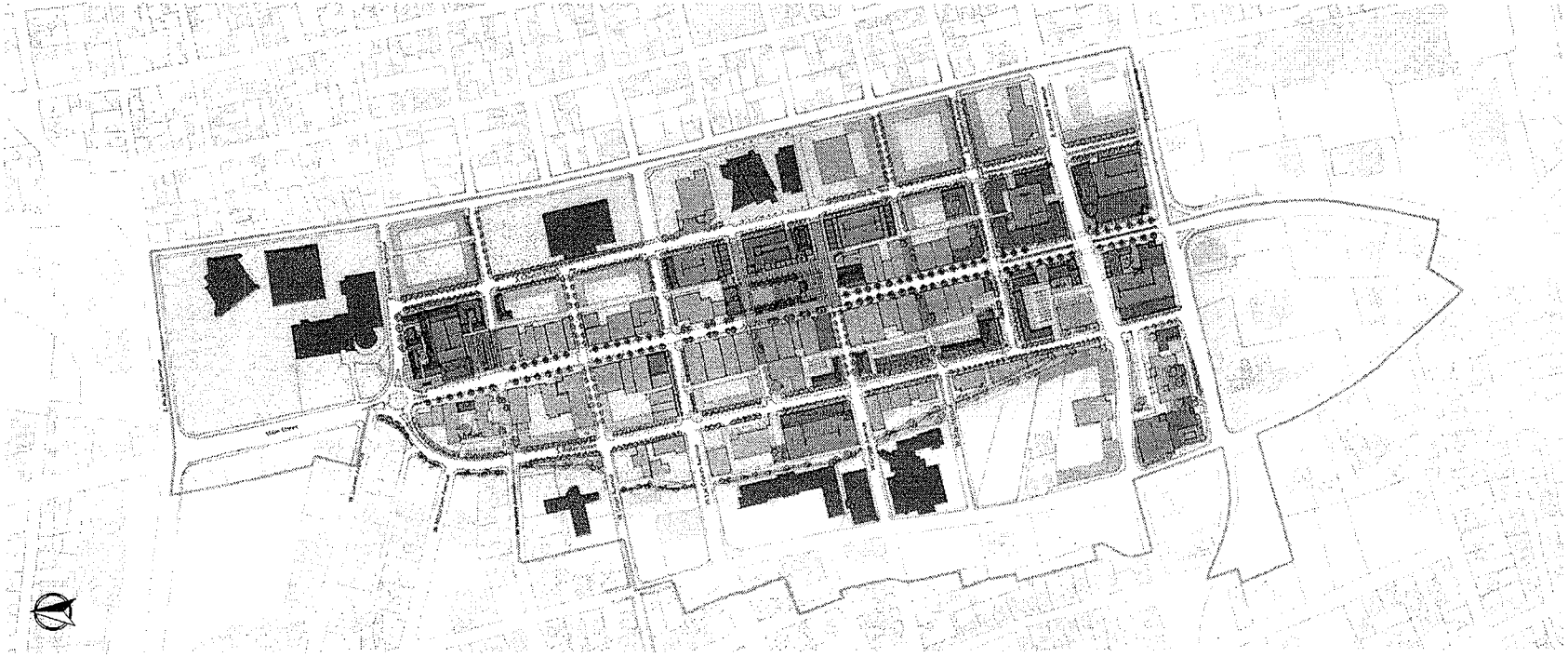
VOTE:
Mayor Miyagishima: _____
Councillor Silva: _____
Councillor Smith: _____
Councillor Pedroza: _____
Councillor Small: _____
Councillor Sorg: _____
Councillor Levatino: _____

Moved by: _____

Seconded by: _____

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

_____
City Attorney



DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Report and Recommendations

FOR A REVITALIZED DOWNTOWN

October 7 - 11, 2013 Charrette

MAIN STREET

PLACE MAKERS

EXHIBIT "A"

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 3

City Council 3

City Executive 3

Community Development Department 3

Additional Charrette Participants 3

PlaceMakers, LLC 3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4

Illustrative Master Plan 5

EVOLUTION OF THE DOWNTOWN PLAN 6

CATALYTIC PROJECTS 7

Restructure Church and Water Streets 7

Build the Plaza 7

Update Downtown Zoning 7

STREETS, LANDSCAPE AND PEDESTRIAN WAYS 8

Church / Water Conversion and Completion of the Grid 8

THE PLAZA 15

Catalyst for Livability 15

Street Walls 15

Plaza Illustration 16

Plaza Looking North 17

Old Post Office Concept 18

Casa de Alabanza Existing Conditions 19

Casa de Alabanza Façade Improvement 20

ZONING UPDATE 21

Existing Zoning 21

SmartCode Regulating Plan 22

CBD SmartCode Draft Summary Tables 23

The CBD SmartCode 24

UPDATES TO PAST PLANS 25

1994 R/UDAT Recommendations 25

2005 Las Cruces Downtown Revitalization Plan Recommendations 25

2011 Recommendations: Downtown Revitalization Ad Hoc Committee 26

2012 Downtown Parking Study Update 27

2013 Master Plan Update recommendations 27

2013 Zoning Analysis 28

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CITY COUNCIL

Kenneth Daniel Gallegos Miyagishima, Mayor

Sharon K. Thomas, Mayor Pro-Tem, Councilor District 6

Miguel Silva, Councilor District 1

Greg Smith, Councilor District 2

Olga Pedroza, Councilor District 3

Nathan Small, Councilor District 4

Gill Sorg, Councilor District 5

CITY EXECUTIVE

Robert Garza, City Manager

Brian Denmark, Chief Operating Officer

Mark Winson, Chief Administrative Officer

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

David Weir, Community Development Director

Andrew Hume, Senior Planner, Interim Downtown Coordinator

ADDITIONAL CHARRETTE PARTICIPANTS

Downtown community businesses, residents, leaders

Downtown Las Cruces Partnership

Las Cruces Community Partners

City of Las Cruces Department Directors

Alameda Depot and Mesilla Neighborhood Associations

Las Cruces Farmers and Crafts Market

Arts, cultural, and educational organizations

Development community

General Public

PLACEMAKERS, LLC

Susan Henderson, Project Principal

Geoff Dyer, Urban Designer, Illustration

Howard Blackson, Policy & Coding

Hazel Borys, Economic Development

Scott Doyon, Communications

Steve Price, Computer Illustrator

José Quezada, Illustration, Conceptual Building Design

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN UPDATE

The Downtown Las Cruces Charrette in October 2013 provided a time of reflection to update and affirm past master plans and studies while articulating today's collective community vision for Downtown. During this week-long event, collaborative planning workshops, round-table focus groups, and public presentations carefully examined Downtown opportunities and developed a plan of action.

Downtown Las Cruces' storied past is well known, challenged by the urban renewal movement of the 1960's that scraped many historic Downtown buildings, installed a pedestrian mall, and restructured Church and Water Streets as one-way arterials.

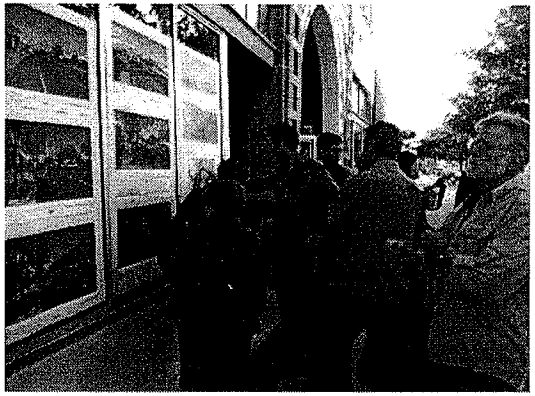
The people of Las Cruces have come together in the time since, and restored much of what was lost by reopening Main Street to cars while maintaining a walkable environment for business and community gatherings.

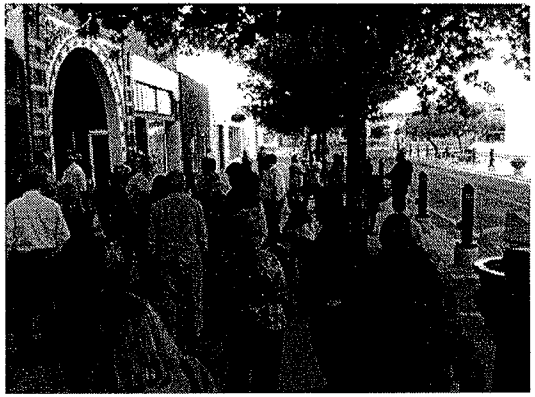
The Downtown charrette celebrated these recent accomplishments, including numerous studies and master plans, public funding of infrastructure improvements for $6.4 million on Main Street reconstruction, and consolidation of governmental and cultural public buildings into the Downtown. Private reinvestment in new restaurants and retail, an Intermodal Transit Center, and public-private art collaborations have all paved the way to get ready for a resurgence in Downtown activity.

Las Cruces Downtown Charrette was a time for meaningful commentary, exchange of ideas, and foresight on how to move forward with Downtown revitalization. Most frequent comments pertained to the importance of a plaza and making Church and Water streets two-way roadways. Predictable zoning, emphasis on building façades, building code flexibility and focus on specific redevelopment areas were also cited as important factors to the revitalization of Downtown.

The public agrees that the future Downtown and plaza should address many needs of the community, support residential living, as well as retail, service, and food and beverage providers. To help reach these goals, three catalytic projects were identified by the community as master plan update priorities:

- Return Church and Water Streets to two-way traffic and reestablish connectivity from the surrounding neighborhoods to Downtown.
- Update the City's Zoning Code as it pertains to Downtown.
- Develop a plaza as the heart of downtown, to provide both an informal gathering place as well as a venue for entertainment and events.





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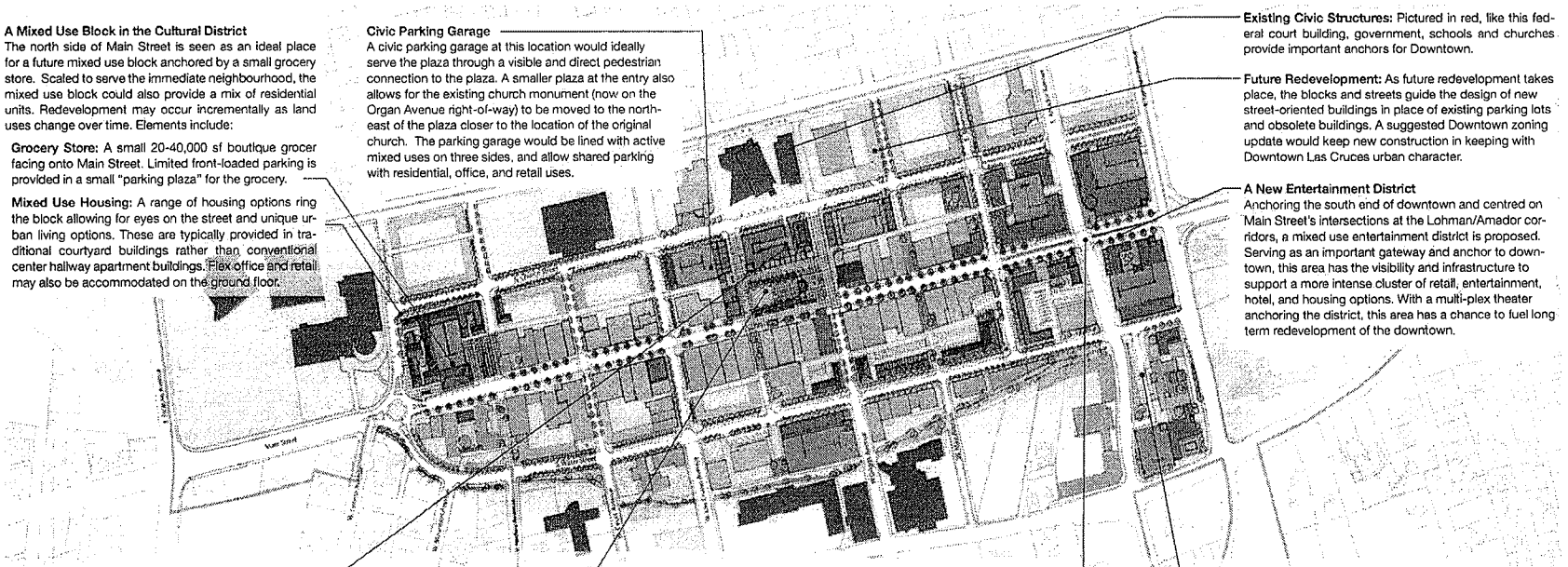
A Mixed Use Block in the Cultural District
The north side of Main Street is seen as an ideal place for a future mixed use block anchored by a small grocery store. Scaled to serve the immediate neighbourhood, the mixed use block could also provide a mix of residential units. Redevelopment may occur incrementally as land uses change over time. Elements include:

Grocery Store: A small 20-40,000 sf boutique grocer facing onto Main Street. Limited front-loaded parking is provided in a small "parking plaza" for the grocery.

Mixed Use Housing: A range of housing options ring the block allowing for eyes on the street and unique urban living options. These are typically provided in traditional courtyard buildings rather than conventional center hallway apartment buildings. Flex office and retail may also be accommodated on the ground floor.

Civic Parking Garage
A civic parking garage at this location would ideally serve the plaza through a visible and direct pedestrian connection to the plaza. A smaller plaza at the entry also allows for the existing church monument (now on the Organ Avenue right-of-way) to be moved to the north-east of the plaza closer to the location of the original church. The parking garage would be lined with active mixed uses on three sides, and allow shared parking with residential, office, and retail uses.



Existing Civic Structures: Pictured in red, like this federal court building, government, schools and churches provide important anchors for Downtown.

Future Redevelopment: As future redevelopment takes place, the blocks and streets guide the design of new street-oriented buildings in place of existing parking lots and obsolete buildings. A suggested Downtown zoning update would keep new construction in keeping with Downtown Las Cruces urban character.

A New Entertainment District
Anchoring the south end of downtown and centred on Main Street's intersections at the Lohman/Amador corridors, a mixed use entertainment district is proposed. Serving as an important gateway and anchor to downtown, this area has the visibility and infrastructure to support a more intense cluster of retail, entertainment, hotel, and housing options. With a multi-plex theater anchoring the district, this area has a chance to fuel long term redevelopment of the downtown.

Mixed Use Catalyst Building
A mixed use catalyst building is proposed in conjunction with the construction of a new plaza. Preserving the historic post office building to the south (with various possible uses to be determined), the proposed configuration of the plaza allows for an important mixed use catalyst building to activate the new space.

Active ground level uses including restaurants, residential amenities, and retail overlook the plaza through a generous covered arcade. Approximately 50 new multi-family residential units above the first floor commercial address an immediate market demand and in turn activate the plaza with a 24-hour residential population.

A New Plaza
A new traditional New Mexican plaza is proposed on the existing Bank of the West drive-through area. Time-tested elements for a great plaza include a multi-purpose surface allowing for a range of activities, streets at the perimeter to activate the plaza (but can be closed for larger events), and active building frontages that vertically define all four sides of the plaza. Several other redevelopment projects are also proposed to improve the edge conditions of the future plaza.

The plaza includes a medium sized performance space, a water fountain play structure, and shaded seating at the perimeter.

Church and Water Streets Redefined
The process of redefining Church and Water Streets starts by directing traffic directly into Main Street rather than siphoning it away to the "racetrack." Currently defined as car-focused arterial streets, Church and Water Streets are proposed as pedestrian friendly thoroughfares with generous sidewalks, street trees, and slower moving traffic. Angled on-street parking replaces parking lots, allowing for redevelopment of adjacent parcels. Reconnections are made to the surrounding neighborhoods with streets and walkways providing amenities for pedestrians, cars and cyclists.

Historic County Courthouse:
Plans are currently underway for the re purposing of the historic County Courthouse into a unique boutique hotel. While the main structure is under renovation now, the jail will be torn down for hotel room expansion in character with the existing structure. This dynamic supports the entertainment and restaurants in the four blocks to the east.

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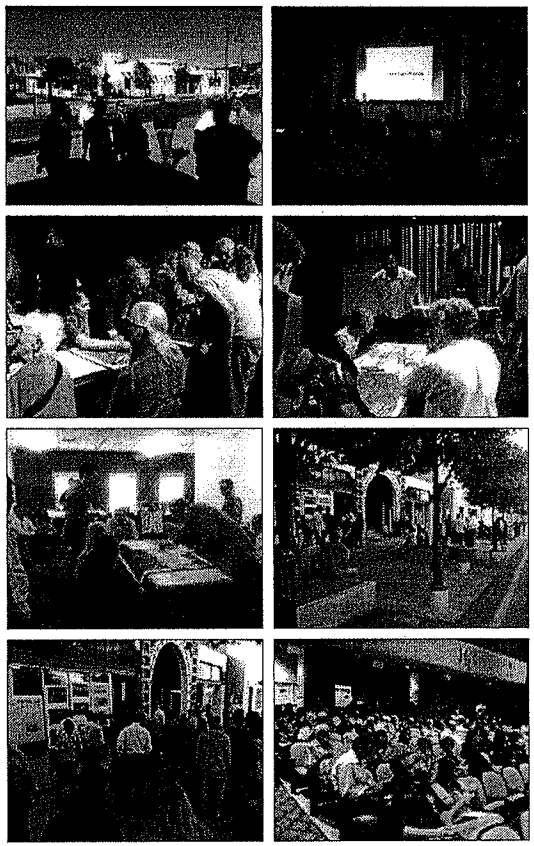


EVOLUTION OF THE DOWNTOWN PLAN

VISIONS AREN'T ACHIEVED OVERNIGHT

Beginning with the 1994 American Institute of Architects Regional / Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) report, a significant body of planning and thought has gone into revitalizing and restoring the vibrancy of Downtown Las Cruces.

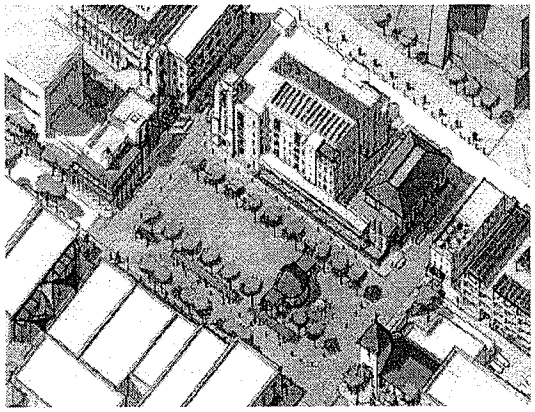
One thread runs through each study, including the most recent 2011 Downtown Revitalization Ad Hoc Committee Recommendations: create a Plaza to heal the wounds left by the Urban Renewal destruction of Downtown. The R/UDAT report refers to the Plaza as the "heart" of the community, and in New Mexico that is certainly true.

It is surprising how many recommendations have been accomplished over the years – a testament to the City's and citizens' commitment to Downtown. However, there are a few items from the 1994 report that remain a work in progress, and these have been noted in all subsequent reports.

The City of Las Cruces Downtown Charrette week-long public workshops and focus groups affirm or edit the various reports and plans, celebrating accomplishments, noting the incomplete or revised recommendations, and culminating in the outstanding recommendations.

In the final chapter of this update, a detailed listing of past plans accomplishments and outstanding recommendations can be found, along with how the Downtown Master Plan Charrette participants have revised and updated these plans:

- 1994 R/UDAT Recommendations
- 2005 Las Cruces Downtown Revitalization Plan Recommendations
- 2011 Recommendations: Downtown Revitalization Ad Hoc Committee
- 2012 Downtown Parking Study Update
- 2013 Master Plan Update Recommendations



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CATALYTIC PROJECTS

This document suggests updates to the Downtown Master Plan and other plans since 1994. The to-do list has been whittled down significantly, with next up a zoning code revision, traffic calming and conversion of Water and Church to two-way streets, and development of a plaza. Traffic management and the plaza are at the top of everyone's list.

Both new and old investors are interested in the right mix of flexibility and certainty, requesting that these catalyst projects are master plan update priorities:

RESTRUCTURE CHURCH AND WATER STREETS

Return Church and Water Streets to two-way traffic and reestablish connectivity from the surrounding neighborhoods to Downtown.

Currently these two streets still feel like a mall within a race track, with backs of buildings and large surface parking lots facing the street. To welcome apartments, condos, retail, food and beverage, these streets must become walkable Downtown streets again.

Current pedestrian and cyclist crossings into the Alameda Depot and Mesquite neighborhoods are infrequent and unsafe. New Downtown amenities will depend on the surrounding neighbors for support, so will need to be accessible. While the Federal Courthouse has blocked access from Mesquite at Griggs and Organ, it is recommended to reconnect May and Bowman to the east.

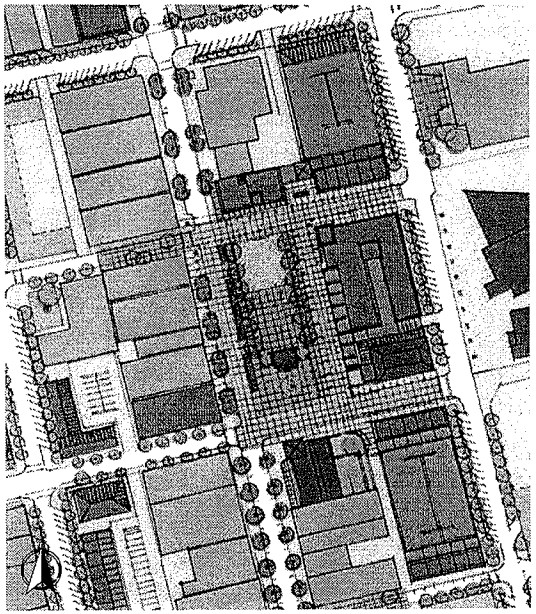
BUILD THE PLAZA

Develop a plaza as the heart of Downtown, to provide both an informal gathering place as well as a venue for entertainment and events.

Quoting from Stefanos Polyzoides' September 2013 AIA keynote address on the subject, "Las Cruces needs its own special place that will draw people into the heart of the city. In the Americas, Europeans created plazas for rituals in public spaces and built around them in beautiful, organized repetition. Repetition is the essence of city building. A city is built in a grid of repeatable blocks that allows movement through space. The values it expresses include connectivity, compactness, diversity and frugality. A plaza can be a primary tool of revitalization. It is the key element, including its retail and commercial activities, that will create synergy Downtown."

UPDATE DOWNTOWN ZONING

Update the City's Zoning Code as it pertains to Downtown. In the existing zoning, developers can build most anything Downtown, including light industry. Local landowners and businesses prefer a more predictable development environment, understanding that predictability is critical to future investors. While few are interested in regulating architectural style, most are ammenable to building massing, setbacks, and parking direction. A very vocal group also recommended including a façade improvement ordinance.



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STREETS, LANDSCAPE AND PEDESTRIAN WAYS

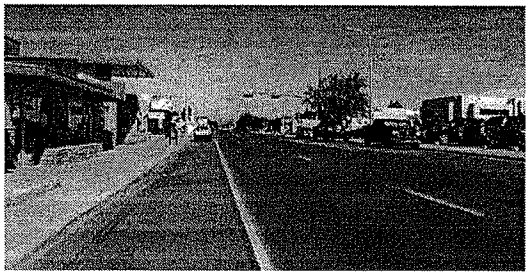
CHURCH / WATER CONVERSION AND COMPLETION OF THE GRID

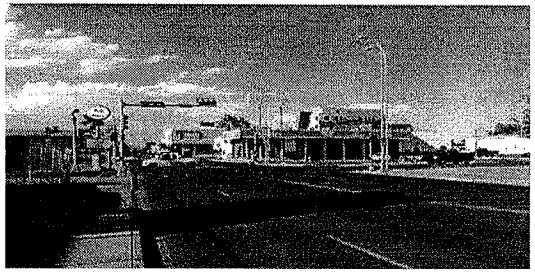
Church and Water Streets should be converted from 1-way streets to 2-way, with traffic calming measures added. Head-out angled parking on one side of each street with parallel parking on the other will provide a significant number of additional parking spaces that should satisfy parking demands in the near term.

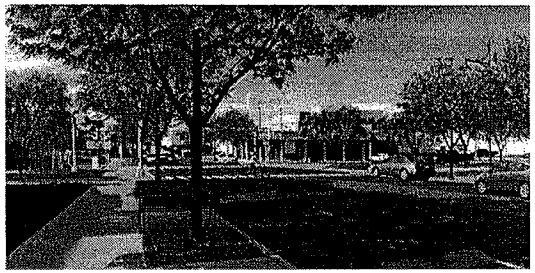
Sidewalks are now 4' on west side and 6' on east side of Water and Church. The sidewalks should be widened to allow sidewalk cafes, street trees for shade, and reduced lane widths to calm traffic.

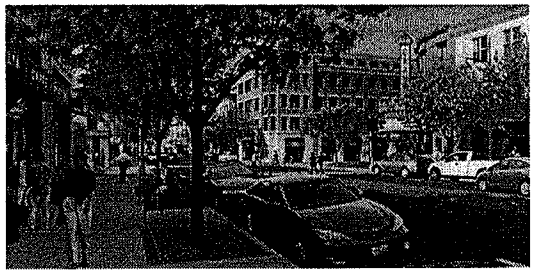
This investment will welcome mixed-use development, particularly when the supportive catalytic project of the zoning code update encourages a downtown-appropriate urban character. Buildings come up to the sidewalk, and create a street wall.

A recommendation of the charrette was to consider Main Street a part of Downtown all the way to Lohman. A streetscape improvement project would incentivize redevelopment on the four busy blocks south of Bowman.









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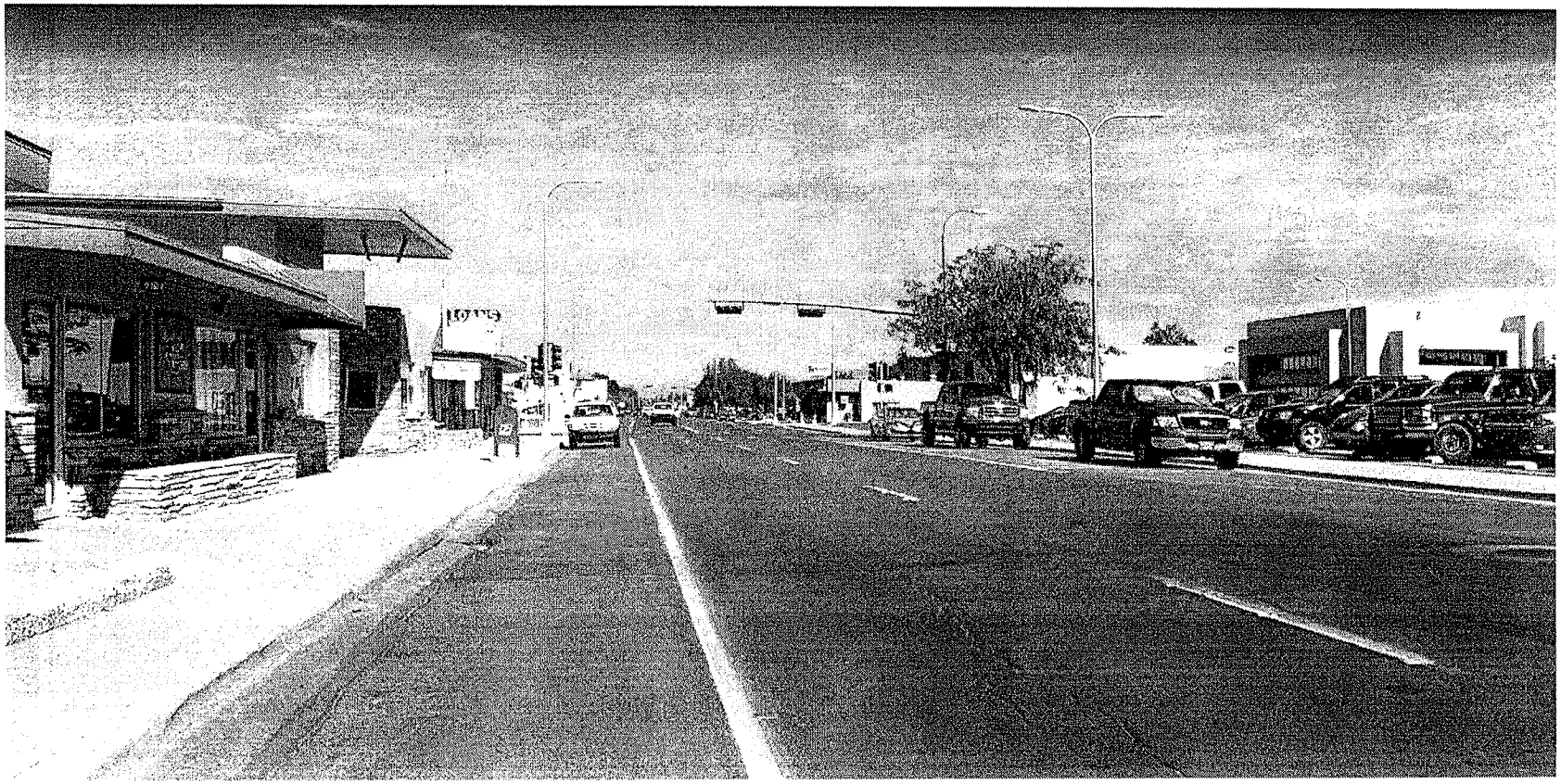

MASTER PLAN UPDATE LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO
CHARRETTE: OCTOBER 7-11, 2013
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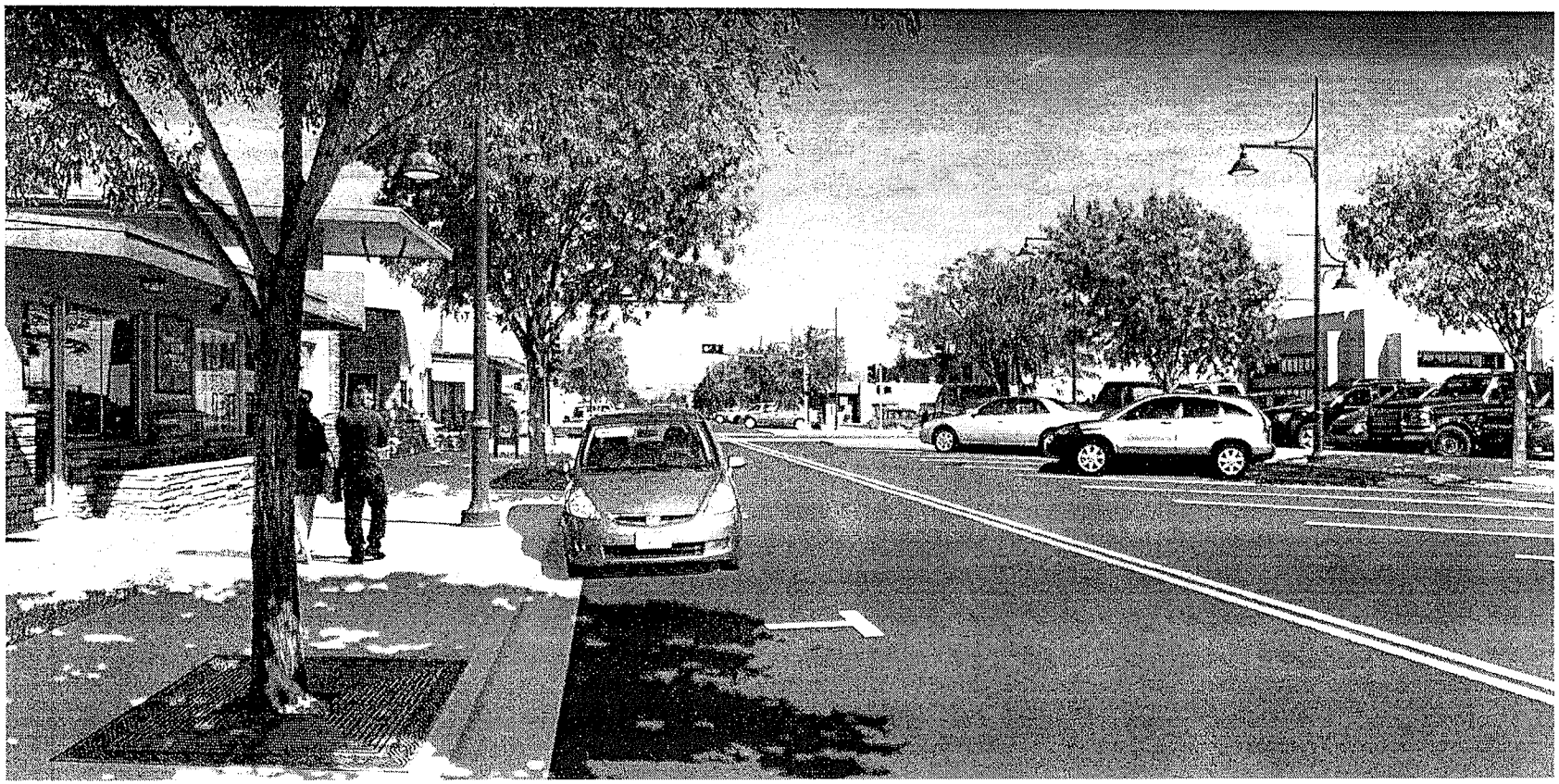
MAIN STREET

WATER STREET LOOKING NORTH TO GRIGGS
Existing Conditions



MASTER PLAN UPDATE LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO
CHARRETTE: OCTOBER 7-11, 2013
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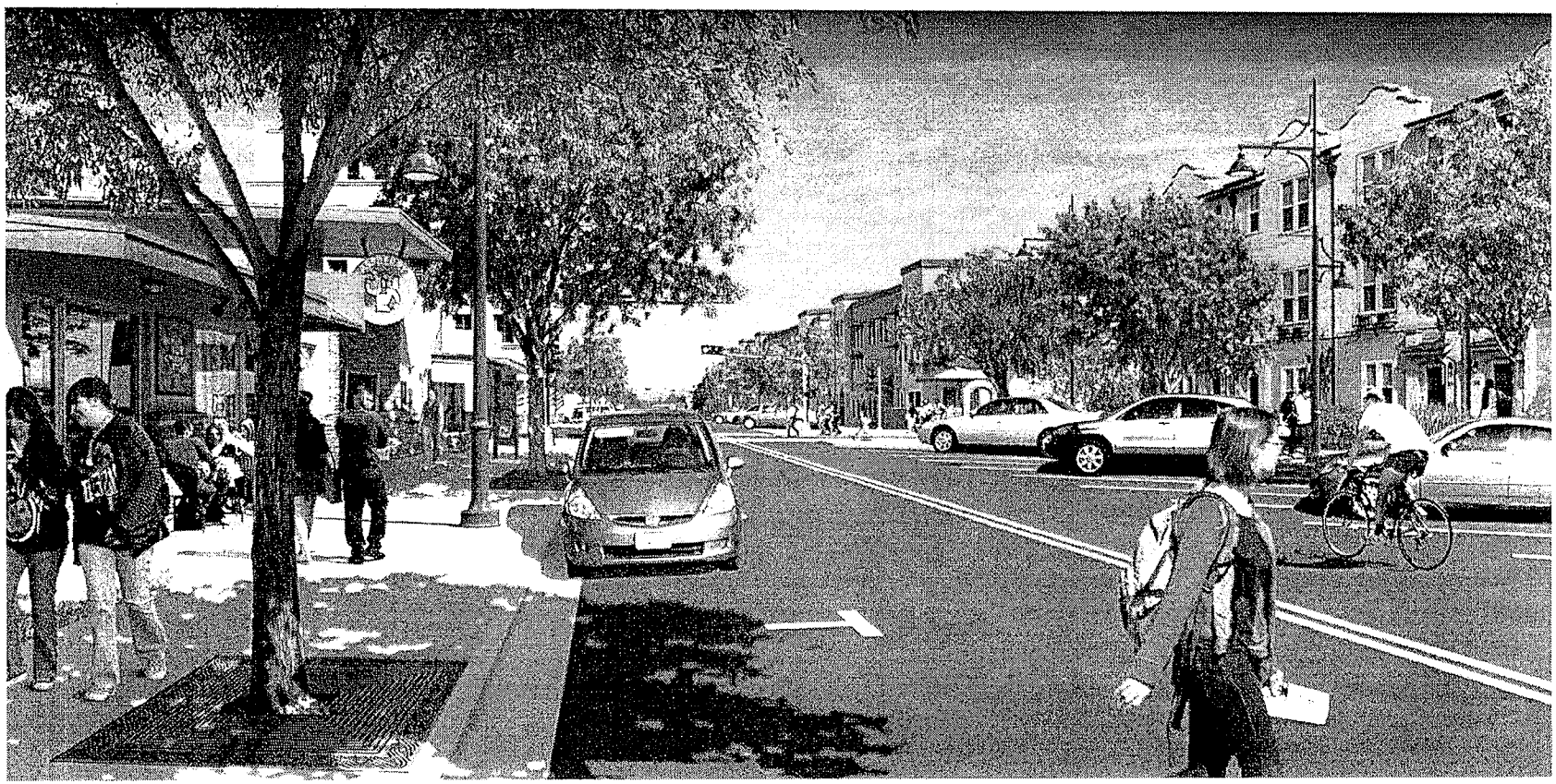
MAIN STREET

WATER STREET LOOKING NORTH TO GRIGGS
Proposed Streetscape Improvements & Two-Way Conversion
10



MASTER PLAN UPDATE LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO
CHARRETTE: OCTOBER 7-11, 2013
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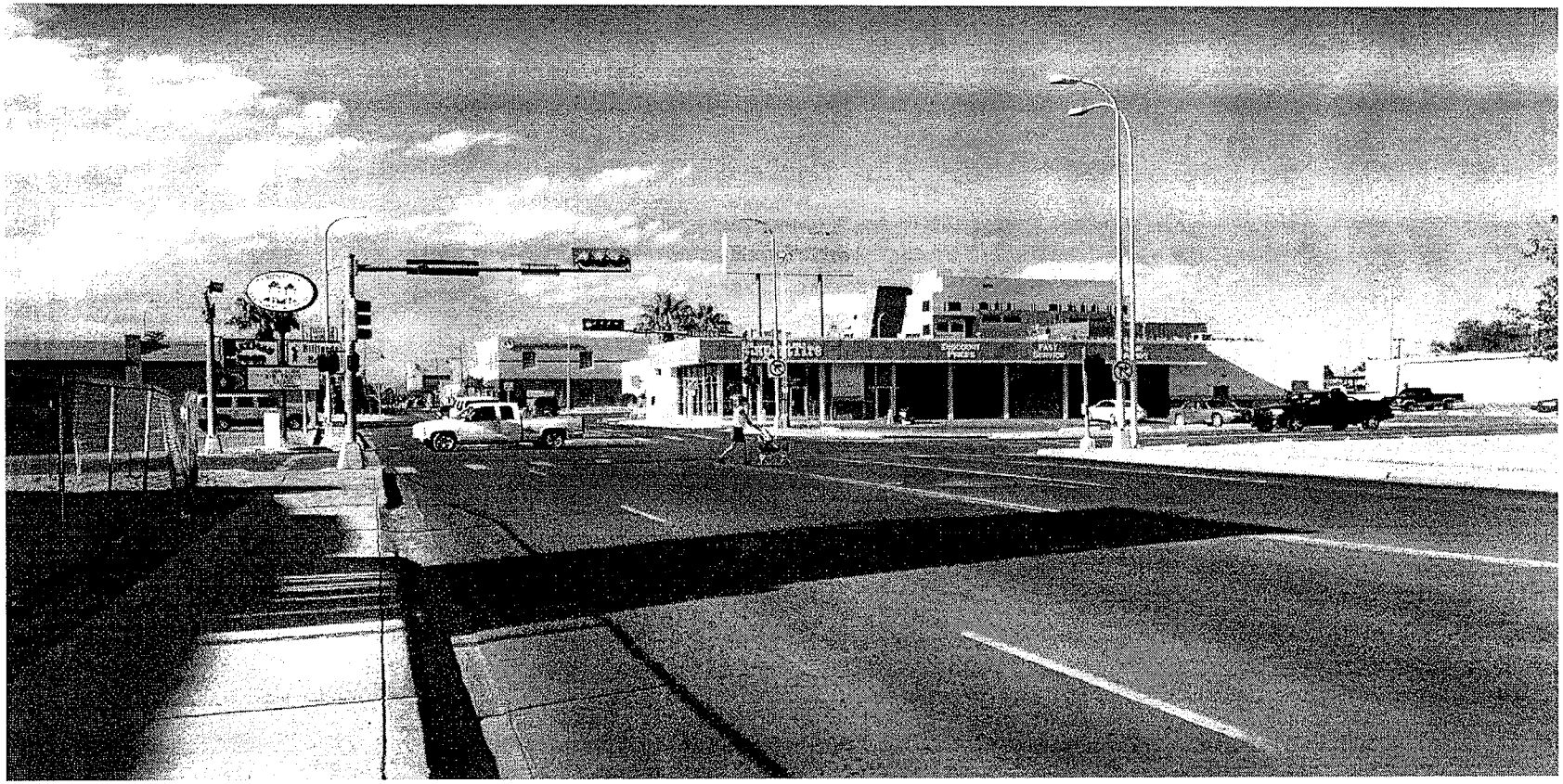
MAIN STREET

WATER STREET LOOKING NORTH TO GRIGGS
Proposed Infill and Housing
11



MASTER PLAN UPDATE LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO
CHARRETTE: OCTOBER 7-11, 2013
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MAIN STREET

MAIN STREET LOOKING NORTH TO AMADOR AVENUE
Existing Conditions
12

MASTER PLAN UPDATE LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO

CHARRETTE: OCTOBER 7-11, 2013

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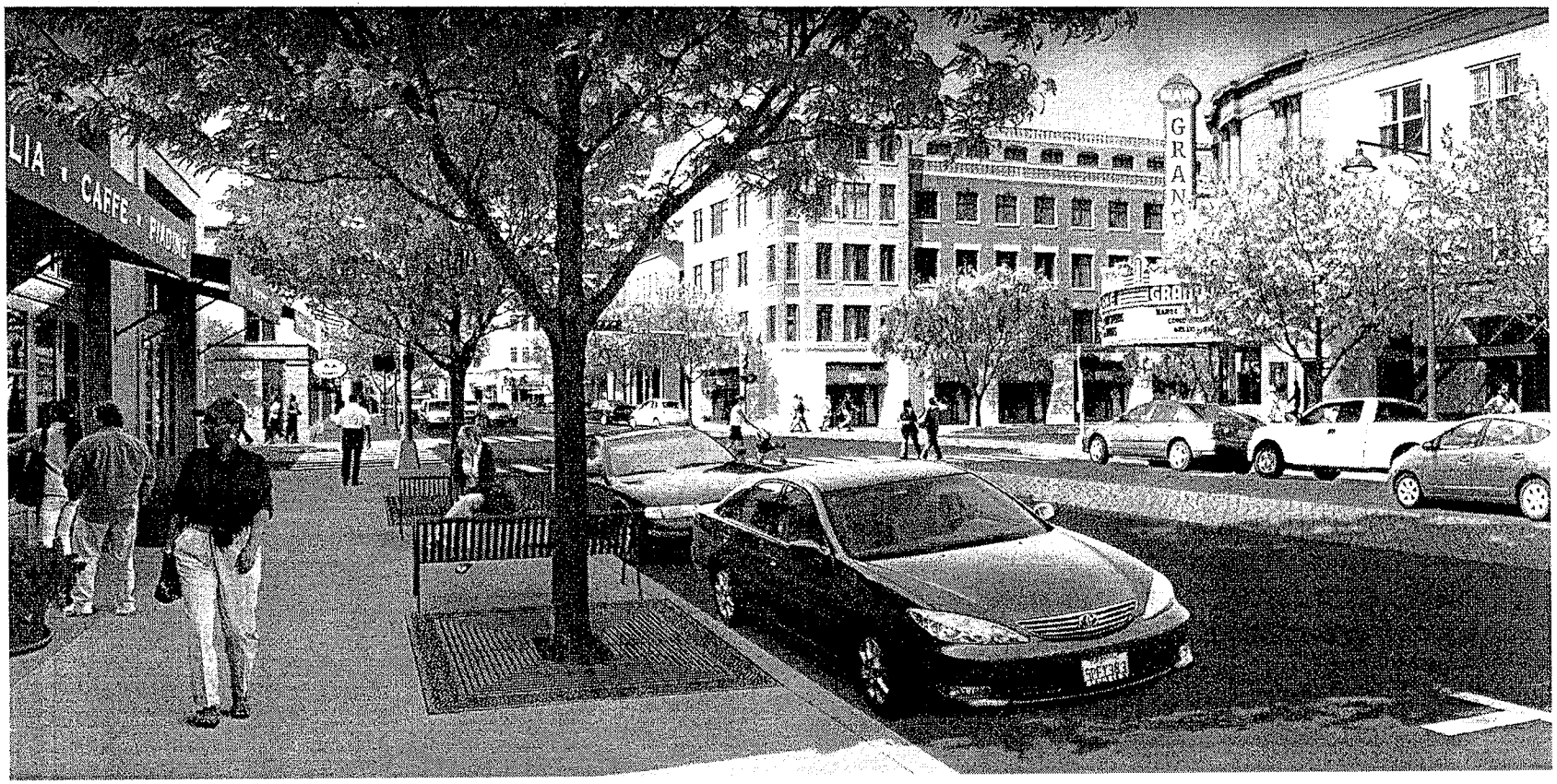
MAIN STREET

MAIN STREET LOOKING NORTH TO AMADOR AVENUE

Proposed Streetscape Improvements



MASTER PLAN UPDATE LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO
CHARRETTE: OCTOBER 7-11, 2013
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MAIN STREET

MAIN STREET LOOKING NORTH TO AMADOR AVENUE
Proposed Infill
14

THE PLAZA

CATALYST FOR LIVABILITY

As the heart of Downtown, the Plaza provides the force to draw people Downtown, as well as the backdrop for critical activity. It becomes the mixer of people and the incubator of business.

Plazas and parks have long been known to promote economic vitality because of their placemaking prowess. This includes property value appreciation, municipal revenue increases, attraction of affluent retirees and knowledge workers. (APA, 2013)

Stefanos Polizoides, author of *Plazas of New Mexico*, advised Las Cruces in September 2013, "Start where there's life and success, and that's Main Street. A church and plaza must be located in the heart of Downtown, where it can be used as a tool of revitalization."

"You want people to come Downtown for a long time, to come with the idea of doing two things and end up doing five. Lingering in town, people spend more money, which means more taxes and increase in the long-term value of property. Human bodies become an advertisement for well-being. Invest in a form that can be leveraged over time so that human beings will say, 'I love this place.'"

The Plaza provides a venue for entertainment, live music, the Farmers and Craft Market, weddings, art events, and small gatherings. Suggested design for the south end of the Plaza has a sound stage for a wide array of live music and other performances as well as an interactive water feature. A limited amount of lawn is in front of the stage, but otherwise the plaza is hardscape with shade trees. Parking is provided along the perimeter, except for during markets and special events, which could shut down the eastern street for pedestrian use. The Plaza perimeter street has no curb and gutter along the eastern side, so it will read as part of the Plaza and can easily be shut down to become part of the space, similar to the detail on Main Street.

STREET WALLS

- There is already a strong street wall on the western side with building faces along Main Street.
- The north side of the Plaza is designed currently as 2 or 3 stories, with a rooftop restaurant and street level retail with portales over the sidewalk, 7,000 SF per floor.
- The east side of Plaza has the Post Office redevelopment that could have a loggia added onto the existing structure facing the Plaza. Charrette market support indicated a preference to take down the 1970's addition and redevelop with residential, with two internal parking areas, and a 20' grid for small scale retail on the first level (small restaurant, beauty salon, shoe repair, or a coffee shop are all the appropriate scale), with larger spaces at the corners (15' to 24' in height). There could be 11 units per story and up 4 stories, 500 – 1,200 SF units. Because of the existing architectural styles of the old post office juxtaposed with the new contemporary federal building, the addition could have very simple details to serve as a backdrop for the surrounding architecture.
- The northeast corner envisions 400-600 SF of enclosed courtyard, with a possible parking structure or interim surface parking. Lights strung across the narrow intimate street of Organ Avenue gives a festive feeling.
- The south side of the Plaza is the existing church, Casa de Alabanza, which could accommodate an addition north of the existing structure. This could provide a walled courtyard for the playground. A business case could be made to help raise the money for the façade improvement as an interdenominational community effort.
- Southeastern corner is a liner building edging the parking lot, closing the last gap in the wall of the outdoor "room." A parking structure could be built here over time, as the Downtown economy develops.

Simplicity is essential, not only because it makes for a better urban experience in a Plaza, but also because of the limitation in funding for Plaza development as well as Church and Water reconstruction.

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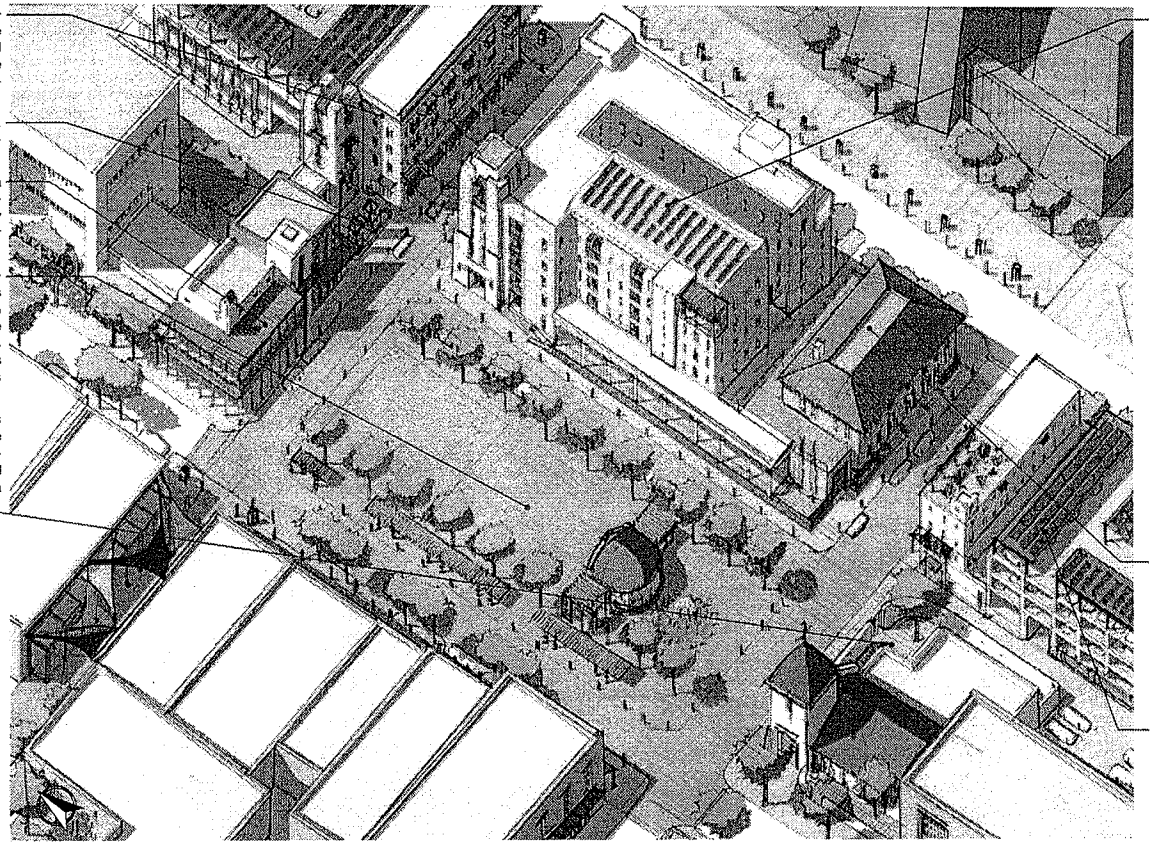
Parking & Housing: This is a likely location for the first municipal parking structure because of the residential uses, additional activity, and parking demand created by the Plaza. Rental units line the garage facing Organ and the street is reopened as a callecita.

St. Genevieve Monument: Relocate the St. Genevieve Monument to the southern plazuela to reopen Organ.

Bank Expansion: Convert bank vault to a restaurant with expansion to the south. Provide a rooftop dining venue – the community requested a brew pub. Provide a first floor façade improvement for the bank.

Plaza: Northern end lawn offers seating during concerts, but the majority of the plaza is a simple paved surface. A new callecita on the east side of the plaza gives access to the post office redevelopment. A band shell is on the south end of the plaza for concerts and events. To the south of the bandshell is an interactive water feature.

Church Façade Improvement: There is room on the northern side of the Casa de Alabanza for an expansion that could provide a courtyard for the existing playground as well as returning a visible presence of a religious institution to the plaza.



Mixed Use Catalyst Building
A mixed use catalyst building is proposed in conjunction with the construction of a new plaza. Preserving the historic post office building to the south with various possible uses to be determined, the proposed configuration of the plaza allows for this important building to activate the new space.

Interactive ground level uses including restaurants, residential amenities, and retail overlook the plaza through a generous covered arcade. Approximately 50 new multi-family residential units above the first floor commercial address an immediate market demand and in turn activate the plaza with a 24-hour residential population.

Post Office Redevelopment: Many uses were suggested for the historic Post Office, including a museum, high-end condominiums, and a fine dining venue. Any of these uses could be combined with the four story housing development proposed to its north. These uses would share internal parking as well as a loggia facing the plaza.

Parking: The parking lot on the southeast corner could remain a surface lot or become structured parking as demand develops. In either case a liner building is proposed to the north, completing the "wall" of the Plaza's southern edge. Housing, office, government, and / or retail are all suitable uses.

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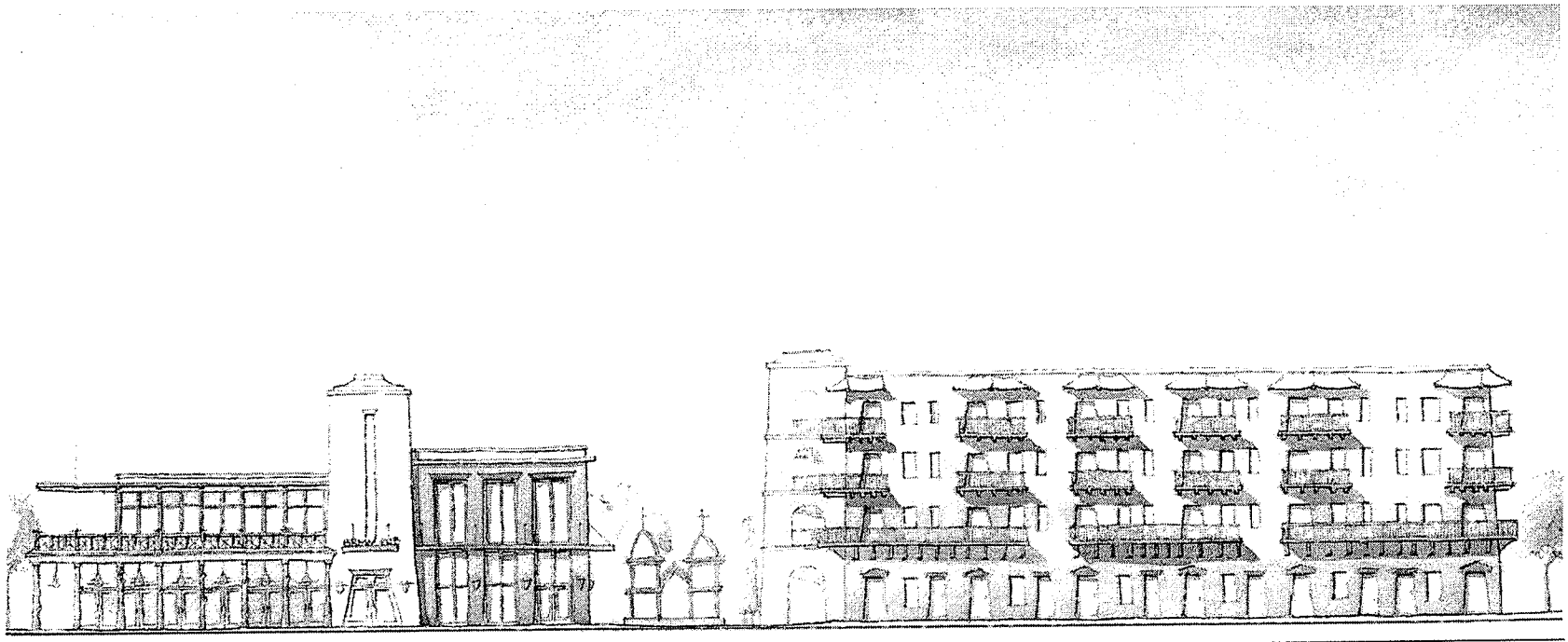
MAIN STREET

THE LAS CRUCES PLAZA
Illustration



MASTER PLAN UPDATE LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO
CHARRETTE: OCTOBER 7-11, 2013

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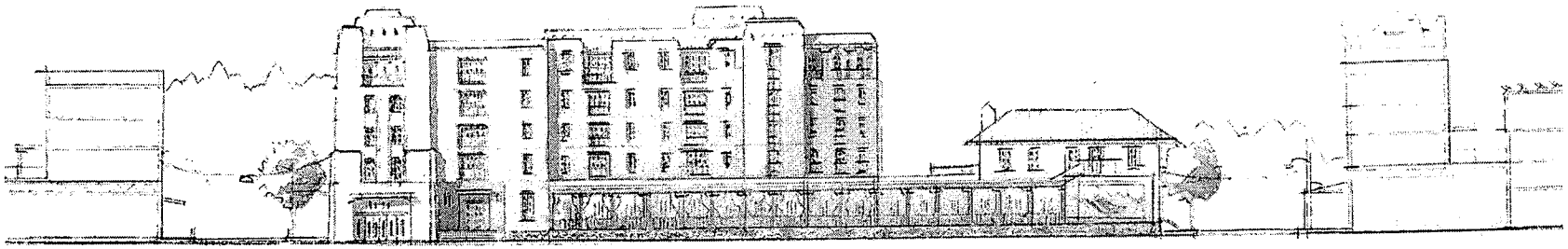
MAIN STREET

REDEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

Standing on the Las Cruces Plaza looking north



MASTER PLAN UPDATE LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO
CHARRETTE: OCTOBER 7-11, 2013
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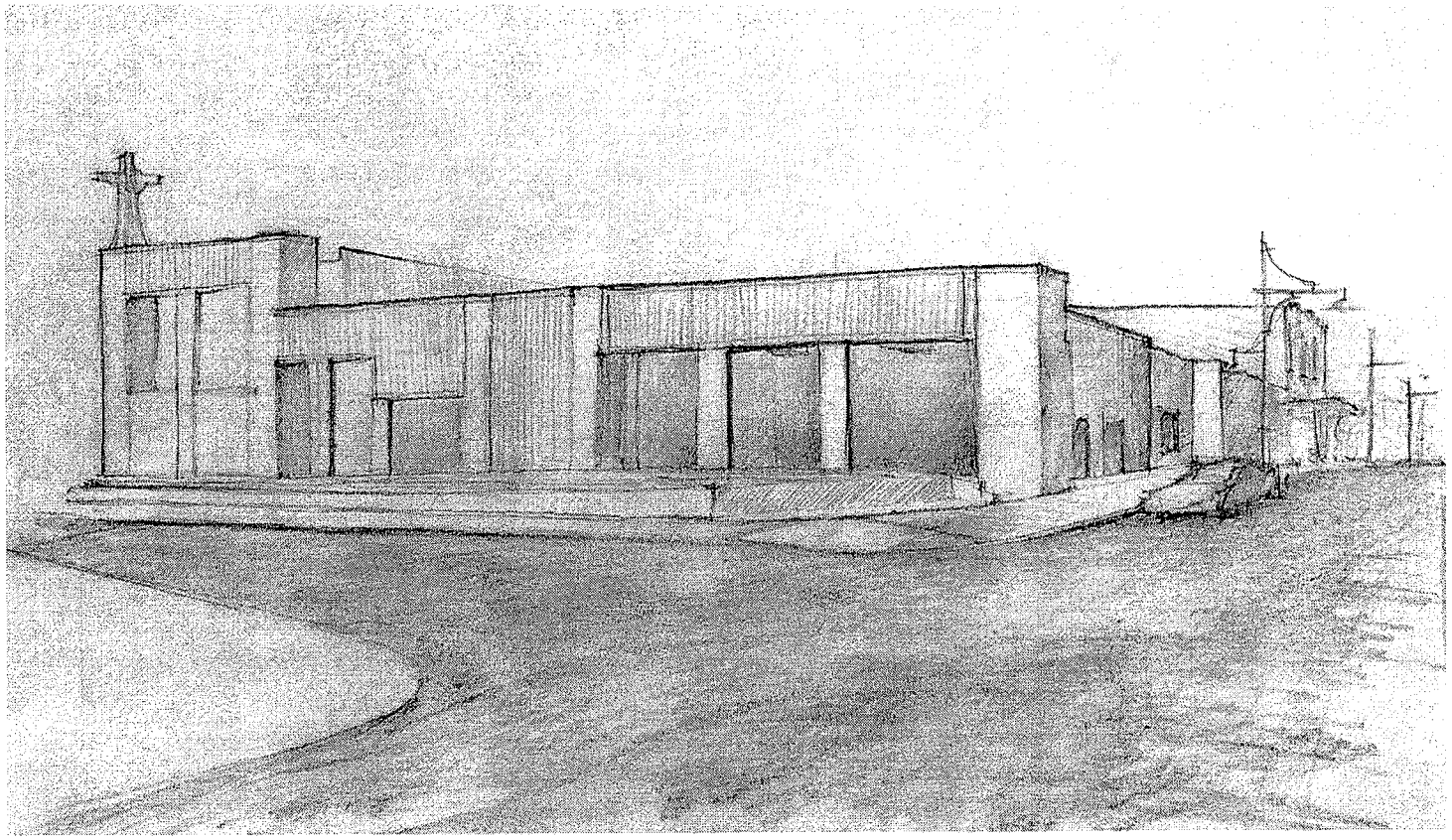
MAIN STREET

OLD POST OFFICE CONCEPT
Standing on the Las Cruces Plaza looking east



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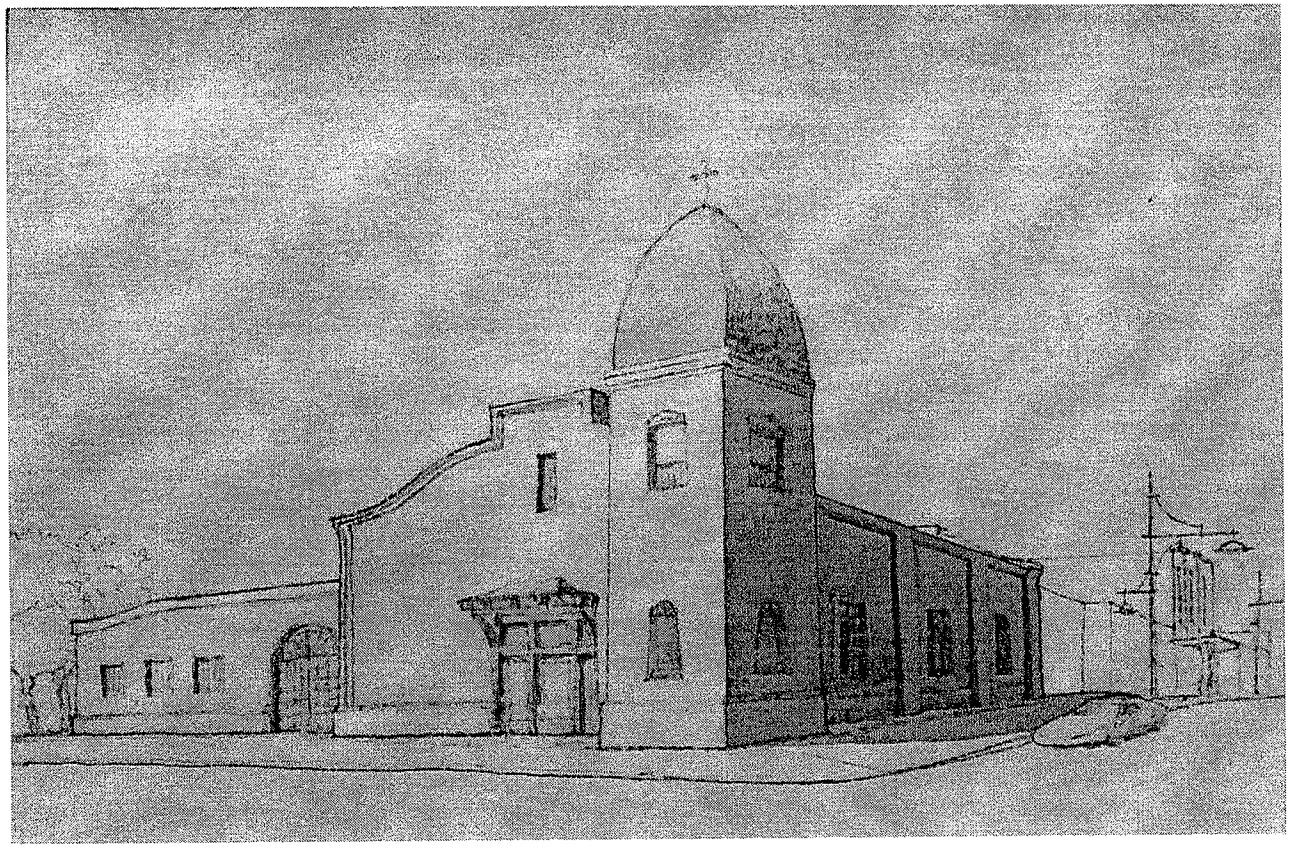
MAIN STREET

CASA DE ALABANZA EXISTING CONDITIONS
Standing on the Las Cruces Plaza looking south



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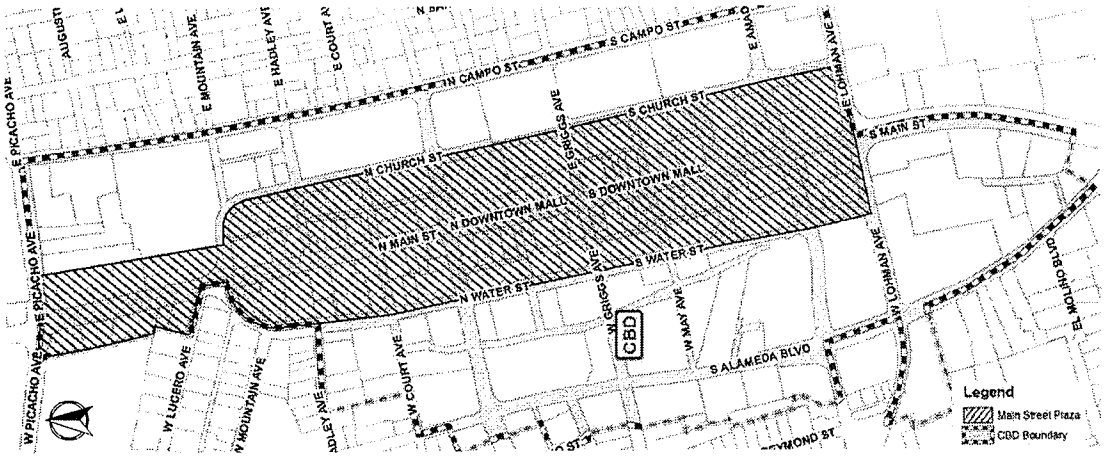
MAIN STREET

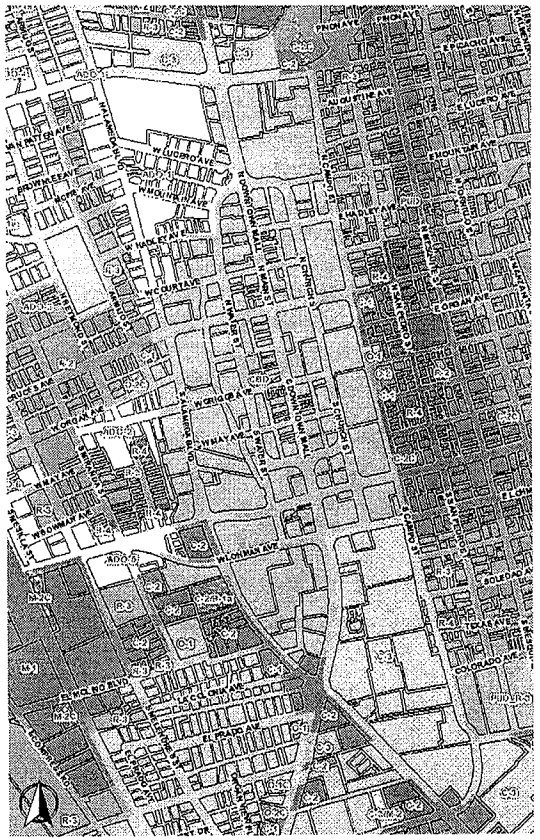
CASA DE ALABANZA FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT
Standing on the Las Cruces Plaza looking south

ZONING UPDATE

EXISTING ZONING

These maps are zoning entitlements under Las Cruces's Zoning Regulations, Chapter 38 of the LCMC. Current regulations surrounding Downtown are based on specific land uses, which segregate land uses into distinct pods. Automobile-focused street standards prevent a pedestrian friendly environment. As a result, vehicle miles travelled are increased as an automobile is required for a majority of trips. During the Downtown Charrette, people expressed a desire to become a more complete neighborhood by adding services and amenities Downtown in keeping with local character. This would help local residents drive less than they currently do, as well as increase the livability of Downtown. The Center for Neighborhood Technology shows homes near Downtown have 1.7 autos per household, drive 17,250 miles per house per year, pay an average annual household transportation cost of over 15% of income for households earning the regional median income of around $35,500, compared to less than 30% for housing.





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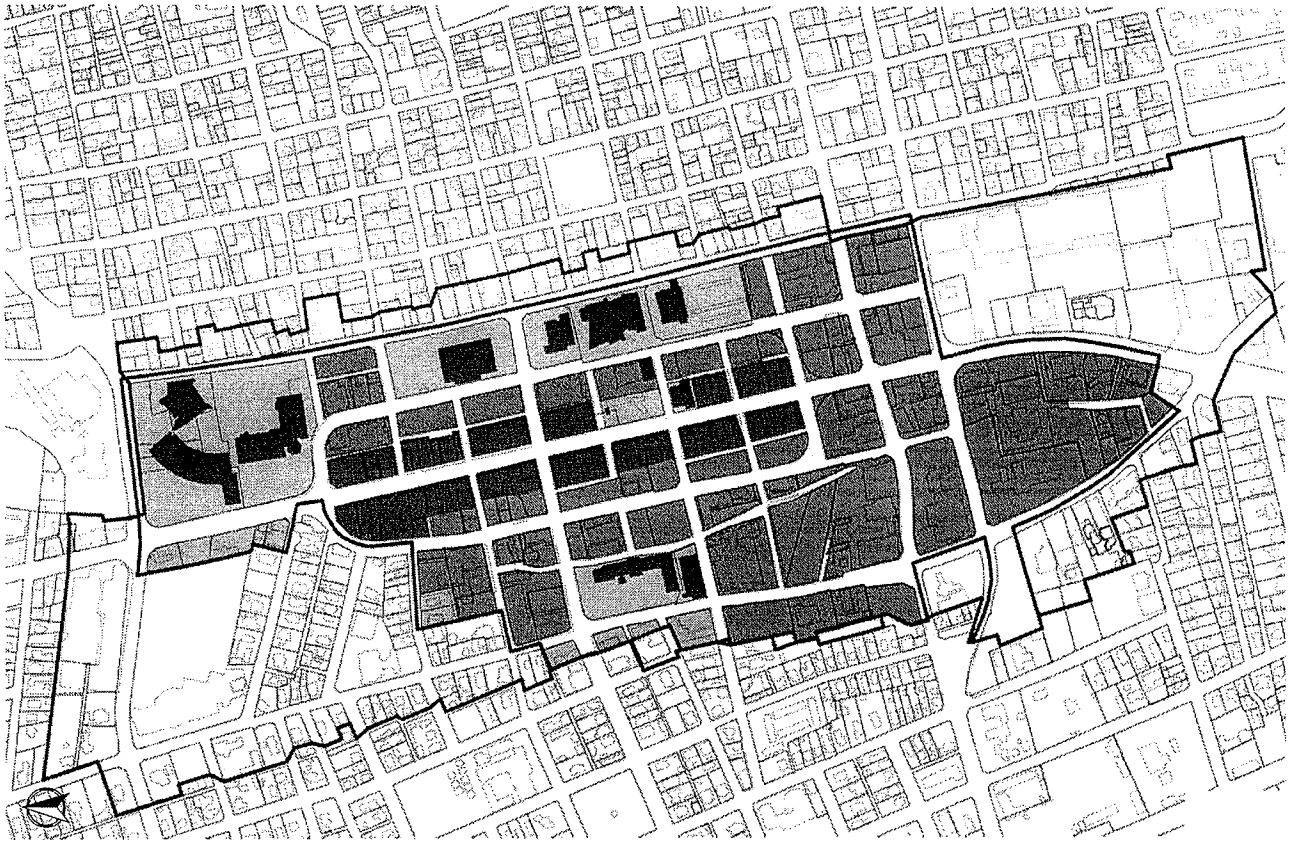
SMARTCODE REGULATING PLAN

The 2005 Plan recommends a zoning update to reflect the goals of the Master Plan and create a mixed-use zoning district for Downtown. The Downtown Charrette process affirmed this direction, since the current Central Business District overlay is permissive and allows new development to be out of character with the vision for Downtown. Examples include that it is currently legal to build industrial uses as well as parking lots in front of buildings. The majority of the public further encourage the City to consider a façade improvement program. A first draft of the basic urban forms (setbacks, massing, height) and zoning map for a zoning update were developed during the Downtown Charrette, with community support expressed to complete the land use rewrite in the near future.

SMARTCODE ZONING DISTRICTS

- T4
- T5
- T5 MAIN STREET
- C CIVIC



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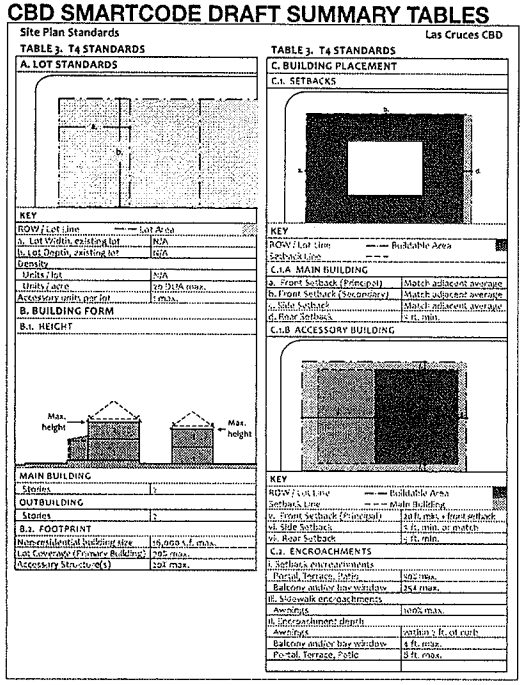
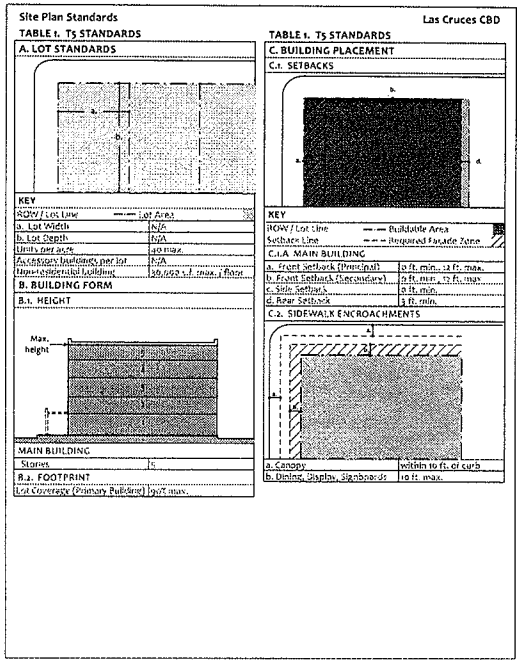
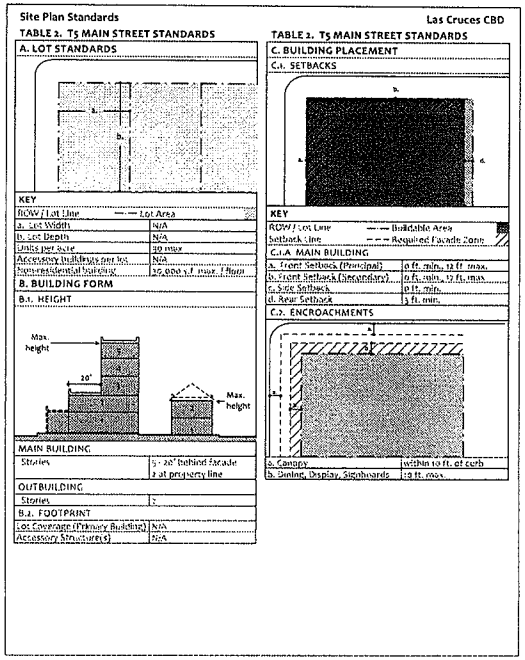
CBD SMARTCODE DRAFT SUMMARY TABLES







When and where would the CBD SmartCode apply? It's important to understand that even though the new zoning may go into effect in the Master Plan Update if City Council rezones the properties, that doesn't mean property owners will have to change anything. The new rules would not affect them until they undertake redevelopment or remodeling that affects more than 50 percent of the taxable value of their property. But most property owners will enjoy new choices under a possible SmartCode. **Are the plans in this report going to be built soon?** The illustrative plans are just that — illustrations of possibilities, not fixed development plans. Real estate market trends and other factors will determine the speed and the specific details of future development. But everything shown on the team's illustrations is possible under the new coding. **So what will happen next?** This is not the end of a process we began back in the 1990's with the R/DAT analysis or with the subsequent master plan updates. It's really the beginning of another stage. We'll go through all our usual steps when we consider a proposed ordinance. So there will be plenty of opportunity for folks to weigh in on what we've done before the master plan update is adopted or we move to the next stage of a zoning update.

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THE CBD SMARTCODE

What is the CBD SmartCode? The SmartCode is a land use law that encourages livable places. It is a form-based code that defines character zones along the rural-to-urban spectrum that we call the Transect. Every town and city's Transect is a little different, and reflects the unique character of the place. The SmartCode would extract the DNA of Las Cruces's vision and enables it by right.

Why are towns and cities moving away from use-based codes to adopt form-based codes? North Americans spend more hours in their cars than anyone on earth, because our laws separate where we live from where we work, learn, and shop, and insist on big, fast roads to connect them all. Roads that are unfriendly to pedestrians, cyclists, families, and transit.

This is because our land use ordinances over the past 80 years have been predominately use-based instead of form-based.

Where else are laws like Las Cruces's SmartCode happening? 480 form-based codes are in the works, covering jurisdictions with 40 million people living in them. Big city adopters include El Paso, Austin, Nashville, Memphis, Baltimore, Miami, Dallas, Denver, Tulsa, and Portland. Doña Ana is drafting form-based codes for portions of the County, which the Downtown Las Cruces zoning update would reference and utilize.

Form-based codes have also been applied to as small as 100-person populations and 35 acres, thanks to the fact that the unit of town planning is the neighborhood. In fact, towns and villages were early adopters on the forefront of coding for character.

It's a tremendous shift in business as usual. Form-based codes reflect proactive, locally-driven efforts to improve quality-of-life and become more economically competitive.

Form-based codes are different than use-based codes in several ways. Form-based code criteria:

- The code focuses primarily on regulating urban form and less on land use. However it does control incompatible uses such as light industrial in a downtown environment.
- The code emphasizes standards and parameters for form with predictable physical outcomes (build-to lines and frontage type requirements) rather than relying on numerical parameters (Floor-Area-Ratio or FAR and density) whose outcomes are impossible to predict.
- The code requires private buildings to shape public space through the use of building form standards with specific requirements for building placement.
- The code promotes and conserves an interconnected street network and pedestrian-scaled blocks.
- Regulations and standards are keyed to specific locations on a regulating plan or zoning map.
- The diagrams in the code are unambiguous, clearly labeled, and accurate in their presentation of spatial configurations.

Even though form-based codes are 30 years old, 84% have been adopted since 2003. They represent a recent advance to enable livability and walkability at the local level.

Coding for character makes for complete neighborhoods that are compact, connected, complex, and convivial.

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UPDATES TO PAST PLANS

1994 R/UDAT RECOMMENDATIONS

Accomplishments

- The St. Genevieve memorial
- Government facilities remaining Downtown
- Landscape improvements
- Tax Increment for Downtown District formed
- Removal of the Main Street canopy
- The Downtown RoadRUNNER Central Transfer Point (CTP) transit center
- Ongoing partnership with the Las Cruces Farmers and Crafts Market
- Development of the Las Cruces Downtown Marketing & Branding Plan

Outstanding Recommendations

There are some recommendations that were initially made by this report that continue to surface though subsequent plans and studies. The ones affirmed by the Downtown Master Plan Charrette include:

- Create a Downtown Plaza
- Calm Downtown traffic
- Provide connections, including pedestrian facilities, from Mesquite and Alameda Depot to Downtown
- Support the historic Downtown character
- Encourage housing Downtown

The R/UDAT Implementation Strategy begins with the reminder that development takes a long time. Although much has been accomplished in the nineteen years since this report, it is good to bear in mind that much of the significant work ahead won't take place quickly.

Revisions

While many of the Menu of Development Options remain relevant to the work at hand, including the limitation of auto-oriented retail and the encouragement of the pedestrian environment, one recommendation has changed dramatically in the last decade. The report indicates there's little demand for high-end or mid-range housing Downtown, and that low-income housing would be problematic. Neither of these suggestions were affirmed in the Downtown Charrette.

A combination of the sub-prime crisis with the urban preferences of Millennials and Boomers is converging to create a vast oversupply of suburban housing stock. Arthur C. Nelson, Director of the Metropolitan Research Center, City & Metropolitan Planning at the University of Utah has modeled future demand for various housing types and forecasts a surplus of 22 million large-lot homes by 2025. (Badger, 2013) That is about 40% of the large-lot homes in existence today.

A recent National Association of Realtors survey found that only 12% of future home buyers want the drivable suburban fringe houses that are in such oversupply. Suburbia was hardest hit by the recession's foreclosures, and many communities are seeing empty homes stripped of copper wire by vandals.

Twenty years ago urban housing was a bargain in many cities and today it carries an enormous premium in vibrant downtowns. Per square foot, urban residential space sells and rents for 40% to 200% more than suburban space in the same cities. (Leinberger, 2008)

2005 LAS CRUCES DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Accomplishments

Like the R/UDAT report, an impressive number of recommendations from the 2005 Revitalization Plan have been accomplished including:

- Main Street opening to traffic
- Renovation of the Rio Grande Theater
- Construction of the new Federal Courthouse
- Optimize shade Downtown
- Use city-owned properties as catalysts for revitalization (in process with the Las Cruces Community Partners agreement)

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Outstanding Recommendations

This plan brings forward some of the outstanding recommendations from the R/UDAT report as well as providing new revitalization strategies that still need to be achieved:

- Update the zoning overlays to reflect the goals of the Plan
- Create a mixed-use zoning district for Downtown
- Maximize on-street parking
- Reestablish the Downtown street wall

The Plan's Preferred Concept has moved a long way toward implementation with the opening of Main Street and the corresponding streetscape improvements. Many of the identified opportunities for infill remain viable.

Revisions

The 2011 Ad Hoc Committee's report lists some suggested revisions as well as an item that isn't available for implementation due to interim developments. This is reopening Organ Street, which is not possible with the construction of La Placita. However, the pedestrian connection can be interpreted as implementation of this strategy and there is still an opportunity to reopen Organ between Main Street and Church Street. There are a few additional suggested revisions because of changing economics and current best practices.

- The Plan calls for the division of Downtown into use-specific districts including Government, Arts, Culture, Entertainment, Specialty Retail, Retail and Office, and Mixed Use. This strategy was common for downtown redevelopment in the last twenty years, but the current best practice is to permit a full mix of uses, with the exception of those that are inappropriate for a downtown. This allows landowners and developers to respond more effectively to market demand and doesn't limit potential investment because of land use constraints. Problems can occur when an abundance of daytime uses congregate, like the Government and Arts districts. This limits activity when those institutions close for the day.
- Finally, the Plan calls for three municipal parking structures. While this is aspirational and supports good urbanism, the excess parking currently available makes this recommendation irrelevant in the near term. Parking structures require large investment in the construction alone, not including the land value. While they also can create impressive revenues, the demand must be significant. Studies show that a national average of $15,552 per space, structured parking typically becomes cost effective only when land prices are extremely high. (vtpi.org, 2013)

2011 RECOMMENDATIONS: DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AD HOC COMMITTEE

Accomplishments

- Although the 2011 Ad Hoc Committee Recommendations are only two years old, the City has completed one of the top three priorities – providing a dedicated planning staff member to focus on Downtown needs.

Outstanding Recommendations

The Ad Hoc Committee had two levels of recommendations. The primary recommendations were a parking management plan and parking structure construction, dedicated staff, and provision for a Plaza. The next tier of priorities included:

- Small public parks
- Reconfiguring Water and Church as two-way streets
- Implementing a cohesive landscape, streetscape, and signage plan

A more detailed list of recommendations included:

- Encouraging Downtown housing
- Zoning and subdivision updates
- Improvement for pedestrian and bicycle facilities

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Suggested Revisions

- While most of the Committee's recommendations built upon prior plans and reports, they did emphasize a new concept that isn't considered to be a best practice for downtown redevelopment. The report recommends all new construction on public-owned land used for parking must remain parking neutral until a parking management plan is in place. While the goal of a parking management plan is an excellent strategy, and necessary to the successful redevelopment of Downtown, a parking neutral policy will delay investment and limit a number of other goals including encouraging housing in the area.

2012 DOWNTOWN PARKING STUDY UPDATE

This study reinforces the point of the last paragraph by indicating a current parking surplus, with even Market Saturday mornings having a surplus of 300 parking spaces. Since Saturday morning is the heaviest demand the Downtown experiences, the Study posits there is sufficient parking to address all needs with little change in demand over the last four years. On typical weekdays, the surplus is 450 spaces, so the recommendation is the City can support additional development without adding or requiring parking. The Study does not recommend a new public garage at this time.

Current best practice in downtown parking management is to permit development to respond to market demand rather than enforce parking minimums. The study also recommends evaluating a pay parking pilot program.

This is supported by the studies of Donald Shoup in The High Cost of Free Parking. While suburbanites expect free parking, this policy produces an over abundance of unnecessary parking in urban areas. (Shoup, 1997)

2013 MASTER PLAN UPDATE RECOMMENDATIONS

While this Master Plan Update amends and updates the previous studies listed above, additional community visioning and planning was done during the October 2013 Downtown Charrette.

People want Downtown to be the first place they take visitors and a place many people want to unwind on evenings and weekends. Downtown and its Plaza should be the heart of the city.

While everyone celebrates the reopening of Main Street, the next step is to become a 24-7 Downtown with residences, retail and entertainment to go with the existing services. Family-friendly amenities are desired, such as a splash park, restroom facilities and bike lanes with plenty of shade connecting gathering places. After hours experiences are also sought after, such as a band stand on the new Plaza, restaurants, brew pubs, a hotel, a movie theater, arts events, and more residential options.

The three catalytic projects detailed in the proceeding chapters were identified by the community to move Downtown toward the remaining to-do list from previous plans, as well as advance the new refinements to the collective local vision:

- Retail on a Main Street needs 12,000 cars a day to do great. Currently Main Street only has 3,000. Calm the traffic on Church and Water, and encourage driving on Main Street. Get the traffic back on Main Street with welcoming streets and more multifamily Downtown. Extend the character of Main Street to Lohman to draw people north on Main.
- Update the Tax Increment District (TID) to fund more than the roadway improvements currently enabled. Opportunity for a minor amendment to the TID plan to help fund anything that benefits Downtown, such as the plaza, is allowed under State regulations. The TID has a sunset clause, ending in the next five years. Replace the TID with a Business Improvement District (BID) to continue Downtown investment. Align the borders of the TID with the borders of the CBD District. Both boundaries may need some adjustment.
- Encourage the Downtown business owners to develop their own entity for paving, lining, cleaning, landscaping, etc. in bulk. A Maintenance Assessment District (MAD) would be beneficial – a clean and safe program.

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- Establish Public Private Partnerships to take care of façade and street improvements, green streets, and to manage Downtown like a mall for hours, lighting, signage, and marketing.
- Consider developing a bicycle friendly business community. The City of Las Cruces Bike Plan is due for an update in the 2015 plan. Better bike racks close to businesses and cycle lanes would be an asset to business and cyclists. Las Cruces Avenue needs a cycle lane, and is the only road that connects Downtown Las Cruces to the historic neighborhoods of Mesquite and Alameda.
- Develop a walking tour of the three areas, starting from the pamphlet that Convention and Visitor Center developed that highlights buildings of interest.
- Develop wayfinding off of I-10 and I-25 into the historic and cultural areas of Downtown.
- Connect NMSU and University Avenue to Downtown. Consider bus routes and events. As housing, dining, and drinking establishments become available downtown, the connection to the University can have tremendous economic value.
- Encourage more public art installations and art events Downtown, leveraging the Art Ramble and RGT Live.
- Implement recommendations to improve development and redevelopment opportunities. Utilize the provisions for historic structures in the International Building Code. Encourage City Council to broadly define historic preservation for structures in Downtown, Mesquite, and the Alameda Depot neighborhoods to incentivize preservation and revitalization.
- The Downtown Coordinator is Andy Hume. Jamey Rickman is the Community Liaison. Make navigating through the City process a little faster and more transparent. Consider an expedited system across the three neighborhoods – Mesquite, Alameda, and Downtown. Right now, the two historic neighborhoods feed the needs of Downtown. Need to capitalize on what they're providing now, plus invert that relationship so that Downtown begins to serve the needs of the neighborhoods.

2013 ZONING ANALYSIS

The Las Cruces Land Development Code, Chapter 38 – Zoning has two special zoning districts that are applicable to Downtown, the CDB Central business district and the Main Street Plaza overlay zone.

The CBD certainly makes it possible to development in a meaningful, urban manner, but the biggest hurdle is that it is so permissive many structures can be developed that are not the most appropriate to the context. If the CDB continues to be the zoning applicable to Downtown, it should be updated at the least to address these potential conflicts.

The 2005 Plan provides an in-depth analysis in Table 8. Current Regulations, beginning on page 59 of the Plan. The table includes columns for code sections, current regulations, consistency with Plan objectives, and recommended amendments. The Downtown Charrette concurs with all the suggested amendments.

While the code allows good development with its permissiveness, the Ad Hoc Committee recommended updating the code, particularly in regard to the administrative process. They stated that the code should "be clear, streamlined, concise, and business friendly to the unique property layout found in Downtown."

The table below lists the outstanding recommendations that can be addressed by a possible Downtown SmartCode.

Origin	Recommendation
1994 R/UDAT	Create a Downtown Plaza
	Calm downtown traffic
	Provide connections, including pedestrian facilities, between the Mesquite and Alameda Depot neighborhoods to Downtown
	Support the historic Downtown character
	Encourage housing Downtown
2005 Master Plan	Update zoning and subdivision regulations to reflect the goals of the Plan
	Maximize on-street parking
	Reestablish the Downtown street wall and screen parking
2011 Ad Hoc Committee	Small public parks
	Reconfiguring Water and Church as two-way streets
	Implementing a cohesive landscape, streetscape, and signage plan
	Reconnect S Water Street to W Lohman Avenue
CBD Overlay Zone Analysis	Revise the Purpose statement to support mixed-use.
	Revise and update permitted uses to reflect goal of 2005 Master Plan and the current economic conditions.
	Update the signage standards to permit all historic sign types.
	Revise parking requirements to reflect market demand.
	Require street trees.
	Add setback/build-to requirements for the general CBD.
	Revise Main Street Plaza overlay J.4. for glazing percentages and transparency.
	Revise Main Street Plaza overlay J.6. materials to remove concrete block.
	Add awning standards. The illustrations are not written with regulatory language.
	Include parking location standards.
	Change height in feet to number of stories.
	Add performance standards to permit brewpubs.

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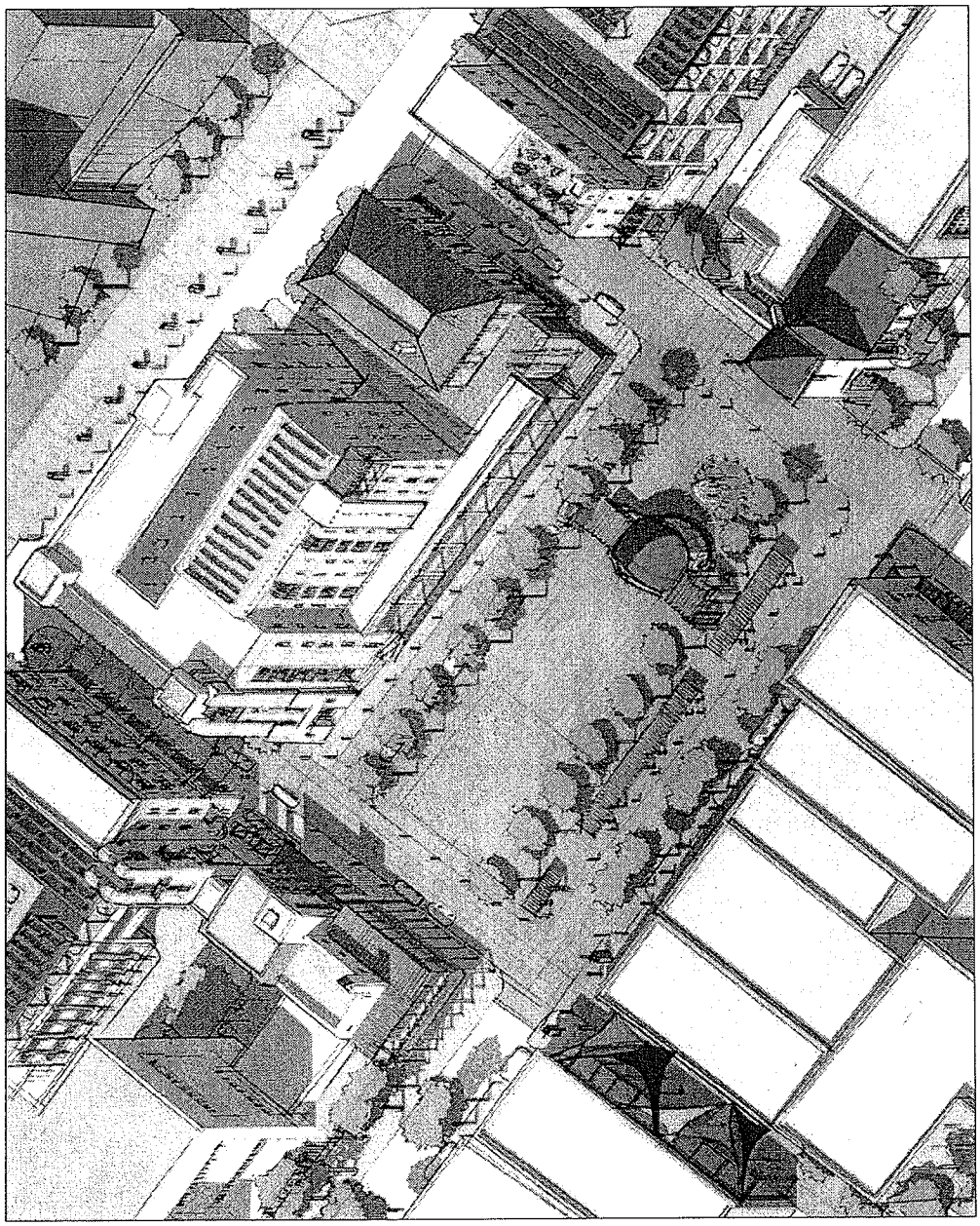
Their detailed recommendations included simplifying the application process and making the administration of the code as transparent as possible. Many of these recommendations could be more simply folded into a new zoning district based on the SmartCode and the Viva Doña Ana Unified Code for Sustainable Development.

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