

**City of Albuquerque & Samitaur Constructs
Albuquerque Rail Yards Master Plan Community Meeting
October 25, 2012
Facilitators' Summary of Plenary Discussion**

Overview and Objectives

The City of Albuquerque is holding a series of public meetings on the redevelopment of the City-owned Rail Yards site in Baretas, having engaged Samitaur Constructs (Samitaur) to develop a Master Plan for the 27.3 acre site. In the second round of public meetings about the project, the Samitaur team presented conceptual ideas about the organization of the site, and the members of the community responded with questions and comments.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Present concepts for the master plan for public review and comment.
- Have an in-depth discussion about people's opinions, suggestions and underlying values for master plan ideas.

Over one hundred people attended the meeting at the Baretas Community Center held on October 25th from 6-8pm. City Councilor Isaac Benton welcomed the participants and introduced members of the Rail Yards Advisory Board who were present. The facilitation team reviewed the agenda and the themes that had emerged in the first round of public meetings in August 2012. Then the Samitaur team gave a slide presentation on conceptual ideas for the Rail Yards, which reflected their understanding of community comments from the August meetings, as well as their own experience. The presentation focused on the site organization, use patterns, massing and scale of the buildings, and the phasing of the redevelopment.

For approximately 45 minutes at the end of the meeting, the participants asked questions of the team and offered comments about their reactions to the conceptual design ideas. The facilitators asked participants to speak in-depth, basing their reactions on their analyses and underlying values.

This report summarizes the discussion at the end of the meeting. Instead of reporting the comments in the order in which the participants offered them, this summary groups comments about similar topics. For example, the comments about community open space have been clustered into a group with individual comments recorded as bullet items; responses by the Samitaur team, where given, are shown in indented italics. The summary mentions the number of people who spoke about each topic; in cases when a single speaker made several points about the same topic, there are more bullets than speakers.

Commenters during the discussion were curious and engaged, asking clear questions, and offering a number of concerns and suggestions. Several concerns expressed will require further analysis by the Samitaur team. In general, however, most comments reflected at least cautious support for many of the ideas presented, and there seems to be a great deal of anticipation for the next Samitaur presentation on the Master Plan, which is scheduled for December 1, 2012.

Participant Comments • Community Meeting • October 25, 2012

Sustainable Design Elements

Four people commented on the sustainable elements proposed for the site:

- This is an exciting project, and its special qualities include the open space, cultural space, sustainable elements (like the water catchment and solar systems), and the farmer's market.
- I like that you've incorporated open space, cultural space, sustainability, and a farmer's market and applaud you for incorporating all of those elements. It is a tribute to an older time and a sustainable approach that emphasizes man working with nature. One suggestion: maybe some recognition of the more ancient history of the area – the Camino Real/4th Street connection – would be an interesting thing to weave in.
- Exciting! I like the use of the sun; I'm glad solar and water catchment have been incorporated into the design.

Edge Treatment (Proposed "Acoustic Mounds")

Four people mentioned the proposed edge treatment, or "acoustic mounds" as Samitaur described them, for the site:

- Are the mounds going to be functional?
 - *Yes. We're proposing the mounds could be designed and landscaped to house small retail shops and hide the mechanical plant.*
- How high are the mounds? I'm concerned about the exhaust from railroad operations on Commercial, which is a site design issue.
 - *The effect of the mound on pollution can be analyzed. It would be 10-15 feet at the highest. The hope is it would improve air quality.*
- I'm concerned that the acoustic mounds won't buffer the sound at the southeast corner of the site along Commercial and Pacific (#11 and #13 on the graphic), where houses currently face the rail system and would face the proposed mounds on the west side of the tracks.
 - *The mounds will absorb sound, not bounce it back.*
- I'm concerned there won't be a breeze-through, and the mounds and the railroad tracks will trap fumes from railroad operations. This may be an unintended consequence of the site design, and it should be analyzed.
 - *The Samitaur team said these concerns can be analyzed.*

Existing Buildings & Spaces

Four people spoke about existing buildings and spaces:

- Regarding your proposal for the Storehouse Building as a live/work space, what do you mean by that? (Also, FYI, the building is 20,000 sq.ft., not 32,000 as you've listed it.)
 - *If the Wheels Museum is relocated on the site, we think the Storehouse should have another life as a live/work/artisan workspace. It's part of a phased approach.*
- The Fire House should not be a restaurant. We have wanted to have a fire museum there, not a restaurant.
- Are you proposing to tear down any buildings?
 - *Some buildings could be torn down. We have to decide what is critical to keep, and the graphic uses dashes to indicate which buildings might be torn down.*
- Tell us about the water shown in the graphic. I think that something more important than water needs to be put in the Transfer Table area. That area has much more potential, for the museum or other uses.
 - *It is a small amount of water that would reflect the adjacent building and provide a symbolic reference to the Rio Grande. It is an idea.*
- I like it that the industrial sheds and buildings are incorporated into the redeveloped site. The big sheds shouldn't be taken up by private uses (such as offices) without maintaining public access.
 - *We're trying to split a hair. Our proposal to reserve space in the big buildings for private users is intended to help generate revenues to support the public uses we're proposing on the site. There needs to be a critical mass on the economic side to support the public part of the project.*
- Also, tenants should be carefully selected.
- I'm worried about the proposal to cut through one of the buildings to show the interior space from outside.
- I commend the team for trying to get all these uses on the site. Why are the historic buildings so much more valuable for private tenants? What is the economics of that?
 - *The projects in the Master Plan must be economically viable. The old, large buildings are the most marketable for desired private uses.*
 - *If it becomes apparent that a cultural use would be better for some of the old buildings, we will consider it.*

Community Open Space

Three people spoke about community open space:

- Albuquerque needs a successful public space. How could we make vibrant public space that reflects a southwest regional style? There should be a regional look.
 - *The style is the Rail Yards, and the buildings are the chief vocabulary. The proposal contains three major public space areas: 1) the Transfer Table will serve as a*

promenade area, protected by “The Scoop” feature; 2) on the south side of the Machine Shop, we’re proposing a public market; and 3) there is a plaza between the Flue Shop and the Tank Shop on the north end. Also, there is a plaza around the Fire House.

- *Nothing has been designed yet. But the existing buildings are emblematic of the region and that sense will be retained.*
- The public spaces seem segregated. When public spaces are sited, they should be surrounded by public uses. Don’t sacrifice accessibility and public space in splitting hairs over the site plan and uses.
 - *The intent is to create regional attractions, which will be an economic engine. It will be a regional generator that is set within or close to the neighborhoods.*
 - *The space in the old buildings will bring jobs that can support the cultural amenities on the site.*
 - *The farmer’s market is designed to bring people to the cultural attractions on the site.*
- The farmer’s market has no hang out space, no grassy area, unlike the popular downtown farmer’s market where people sit on the grass. Further, the long narrow space for the farmer’s market may sacrifice the sense of community that the idea seeks to engender. The downtown farmer’s market is highly successful. It should be studied to learn from its success without duplicating it.
 - *We have to make sure that there is no conflict with the downtown farmer’s market.*
 - *The space planned for the farmer’s market is huge. It has space for seating and isn’t just a walkway. It can be designed to be a welcoming space.*

Connection to Neighborhoods

Three people spoke about the connection of the site to the surrounding community:

- I appreciate the neighborhood scale, the gateway located in the center of the site, and the integration of the project into the communities.
- I’m glad that the “front door” to the site is on 2nd Street, not at the north end.
- Integration of the San Jose/South Broadway is a concern. Perhaps there could be additional bridges or some other design solution to create a better physical connection to the neighborhoods.
 - *Bridges are expensive, so the one we’re planning is located in the center of the site.*
 - *We are working with the South Broadway neighborhood and the Public Works Department to make sure the existing Guadalupe Overpass works well.*
- What is the plan to connect the site to 4th Street and South Broadway?
 - *We are looking at how to make a pedestrian connection along Atlantic that flows to 4th Street, and for the downtown shuttle to be extended to the Rail Yards.*
 - *We also recognize that connections to Bridge and South Broadway are important, as is the connection to the Transportation Center.*

Workforce Housing

Two speakers mentioned workforce housing (NOTE: Comments regarding the proposed phasing of Workforce Housing are captured below in the “Planning Process and Phasing” section):

- I’m impressed with the potential for housing and revitalization.
- There should be more emphasis on housing. The neighborhood would be willing to partner on housing development. The neighborhood should have access to the housing.
- Vacant properties adjacent to the site should be considered, such as the vacant site on 2nd Street recently purchased by the Sawmill Community Land Trust.

Jobs and Economic Development

Two people spoke about jobs and economic benefits for the community:

- What kinds of jobs will come to the space?
- Economic benefits from redevelopment should benefit people of color, which hasn’t happened before, including jobs with good wages.
 - *We are planning for jobs that will pay living wages.*
 - *We are talking to UNM and the Hispano Chamber of Commerce about training people from the community, and Build New Mexico is a partner on the team.*
 - *We will ensure a connection between jobs and the communities.*

Planning Process and Phasing

Five people mentioned the planning process or phasing:

- Is workforce housing the last phase of construction? A lot of funding is being reserved for it, and it needs to be considered sooner.
 - *We agree that housing may be able to be considered sooner. At this point, construction access to cultural areas will have to be developed; also, we are unsure about the sequence of working with housing developers, and therefore workforce housing isn’t included in the first phase (at present).*
- This is a “chicken and egg” question. There is an RFP for the Blacksmith Shop as an interim use venue for a farmer’s market and other activities. But the Phase 1 you’ve shown proposes similar uses and seems like it would bring more vibrancy back to the site. Why wasn’t this Phase 1 considered for the “interim use” instead?
 - *[City staff response] Planning for the Blacksmith Shop idea began a year ago, and an RFP has already been released. We really like Samitaur’s Phase 1, too, and the next step is to get money to support that also.*

- I compliment the Samitaur team. This is a very handsome project. As an architect, I would suggest a different approach: What can you do with the historic buildings? Who will work there, doing what, in those buildings? By deciding where the cultural facilities and jobs go, it eliminates possibilities for the historic buildings. These questions need more investigation. Whether or not the new buildings are in the best locations may depend on the types of jobs that will be generated.
- When will the project end? What is the timeline?
 - *When we bring the plan to the City Council, we hope the contract will be approved. At that point, we will be able to move forward with marketing the Rail Yards site to potential businesses.*
 - *By early January/February 2014, we hope to begin site work and bring in permanent tenants.*
 - *We hope to have an RFP (a Request for Proposals) for a local housing developer and to break ground on the housing in 2014.*
- Are there opportunities for murals as an interim use?
 - *I don't see why not.*

Additional Comments

- The smokestack feature reinforces a historic negative for the communities surrounding the site because the original was a source of pollution.
 - *The idea was that the smokestack could foster a positive connection to the land*
- WHEELS contributed \$2 million toward this project. I love the concept presented this evening. However, the contribution of WHEELS Museum is not quite honored here, and it needs to occupy an important part of the site. What space can the Museum have? There is no designation of it in the plan.