

EPA LAND REVITALIZATION REGIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT



LEON VALLEY AUTOMOBILE DEALERSHIP REVITALIZATION STUDY

FINAL REPORT NOVEMBER 2011

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

EPA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT

The City of Leon Valley, Texas was selected for a technical assistance pilot project from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 to develop sustainable redevelopment options for closed auto dealerships. The focus of the pilot project is the former Fiesta Dodge and Lincoln Mercury dealerships, located at 6300-6324 E. Bandera Road. The aim of the process is to provide a replicable model for additional closed dealerships located throughout the country.

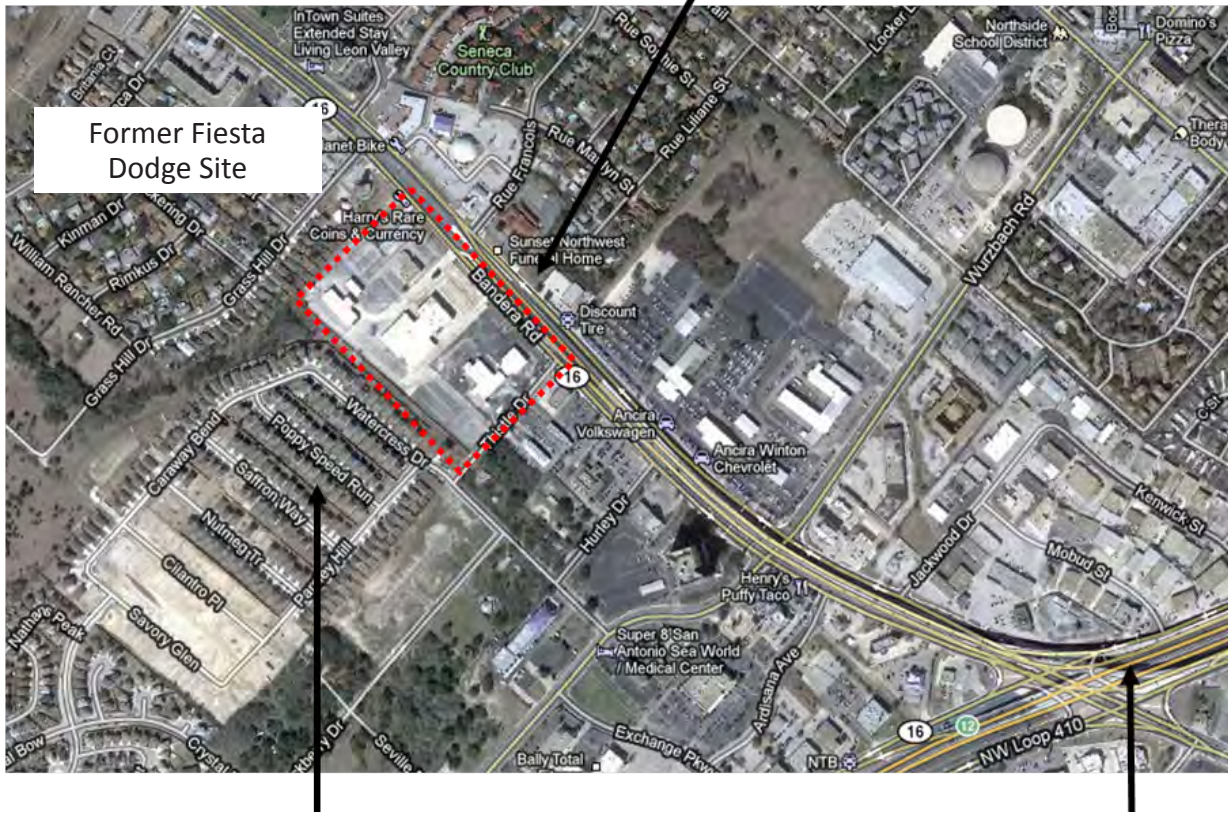
This report summarizes technical assistance provided to the City of Leon Valley throughout the project. It includes material collected as part of market and site technical analysis prepared for a June 9, 2011, webinar and a community workshop held on August 31, 2011. With the information collected during analysis and at the workshop, the City of Leon Valley will have an action plan that allows the city, and other similar communities, to address closed auto dealerships in a sustainable manner—one that focuses on putting properties back into a productive use and benefits all key stakeholders.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SCOPE

EPA technical assistance activities included the following tasks:

- Market assessment
- Analysis of overall site conditions including opportunities and challenges
- Reuse options for sustainable development
- Summary of August 31 workshop with community stakeholders
- Lessons learned from all efforts

Loop 410 Access Ramp at
Bandera Road



Residential
Neighborhood

Loop 410

Figure 1: Site Orientation Plan

SITE



Figure 2: Fiesta Dodge Site



Figure 3: Fiesta Dodge Site Looking North

SITE

GENERAL SITE CONDITIONS

The site consists of three parcels totaling 13.3 acres. It was formerly used as an auto dealership and associated repair facility, with nine buildings, most of metal construction, totaling 92,000 square feet.

Location

The site is approximately one-half mile from an exit off of Loop 410, a major thoroughfare in San Antonio. The Southwest Texas Medical Center is located two miles north of the site and the San Antonio International Airport is approximately nine miles northeast.

The site is located at the corner of Bandera Road and Thistle Drive. It is surrounded by strip commercial centers, small office complexes, auto-related uses (e.g., dealerships, repair shops), and various service-related businesses (e.g., restaurants, funeral homes, cell phone stores). A residential single family subdivision is located directly behind the site, separated by a razor-wire fence and small buffer area.

Key Observations:

- Generally good location
- Near main arteries, a major airport, and key employment centers
- Bandera Road is a major transportation corridor, linking San Antonio to the northwest suburbs, with heavy traffic in the morning and evening “rush” hours
- Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) owns and operates Bandera Road; no current plans to widen or alter the roadway
- Surrounded mainly by retail and commercial uses – none that stand out
- Adjacent residential development will need to be considered in future uses



Figure 4: Adjacent Residential Development

ACCESS AND VISIBILITY

The site is located on the city's main thoroughfare, Bandera Road. Bandera Road runs directly through the center of Leon Valley, from northwest to southeast and is a highly traveled, multi-lane road. It is estimated that 57,000 cars travel by the site daily.

While the site has a highly desirable frontage, the elevated exit from Loop 410 blocks visibility of the site. In addition, due to the exit location, a car would have to drive approximately one-half mile past the site and reverse directions in order to access the site. There is some possibility of access via other local roads, but that would require additional travel and knowledge of local streets.

Key Observations:

- Limited visibility from the northeast-bound travel lane due to an elevated exit
- Challenging access because of the on/off exits to Loop 410
- Due to access issues, it is difficult to stop at the Fiesta Dodge site without prior planning and knowledge of the surface street configuration
- Potential for access from surface streets is limited



SITE



Figure 5: View of Bandera Road Traveling Southwest

Figure 6: Photo from Site Showing Loop 410 Ramp

SITE

PARCEL SIZE AND CHARACTERISTICS

The 13.3-acre site is one of the largest available properties in Leon Valley. While large, the site is complicated by its topography. It is characterized by rolling hills that generally slope downwards from Bandera Road. The entire site is paved, with a few trees and grass patches. Curb cuts are located along Bandera Road and Thistle Road.

Key Observations:

- The large size of the site may be appealing to big box retailers
- Site is complicated by steep topography that may require extensive grading



Figure 7: Site Topography

LAND USE REGULATIONS

The former Fiesta Dodge site is currently located in a B-3 Commercial District. The land uses adjacent to the site are primarily zoned B-2 Retail District and B-3 Commercial District; however, there are some parcels nearby that are zoned R-2 Two-Family Dwelling District, R-3 Multiple-Family Dwelling District, and R-4 Townhouse District. Immediately behind the site, the zoning is R-6 Garden House District. This zoning mix is consistent with the majority of Bandera Road.

The current Leon Valley zoning code defines the B-3 Commercial District as comprising land and structures used to furnish commercial needs, wholesale services, and some light assembling of goods, with residential uses prohibited. These are generally considered retail or service facilities, with some auto-related uses.¹

In July 2010, Leon Valley amended the zoning code to include a Sustainability, Gateway, and Commercial/Industrial Overlay District. The site falls within the boundaries of the Sustainability Overlay District. The ordinance emphasizes clustered or nodal development oriented towards the street, encouraging a more pedestrian-friendly streetscape. The updated table of uses in the Sustainability Overlay allows a majority of retail and commercial/office uses (e.g., clothing stores, candy shop, dental office). The overlay district also allows for townhouse, loft, and live-work space, and encourages mixed-use buildings. Most auto-related uses are not allowed, even in the B-3 zone.²

The overlay ordinance provides performance standards for lighting, signage, landscaping, building height, and front/side/rear yards, façades, roofs, articulation, etc. The ordinance includes point systems for the landscape and architecture. The ordinance also stipulates that buildings must be constructed in tri-partite (three vertical parts) architecture, with landmark features at key entranceways.

Key Observations:

- Zoning generally allows most commercial uses
- Automobile uses are prohibited in overlay zone
- Mixed use of the site would require rezoning

¹ City of Leon Valley, TX Code of Ordinances. <http://codes.franklinlegal.net/leonvalley-flp/>

² City of Leon Valley, TX Ordinance 10-025

SITE

SITE

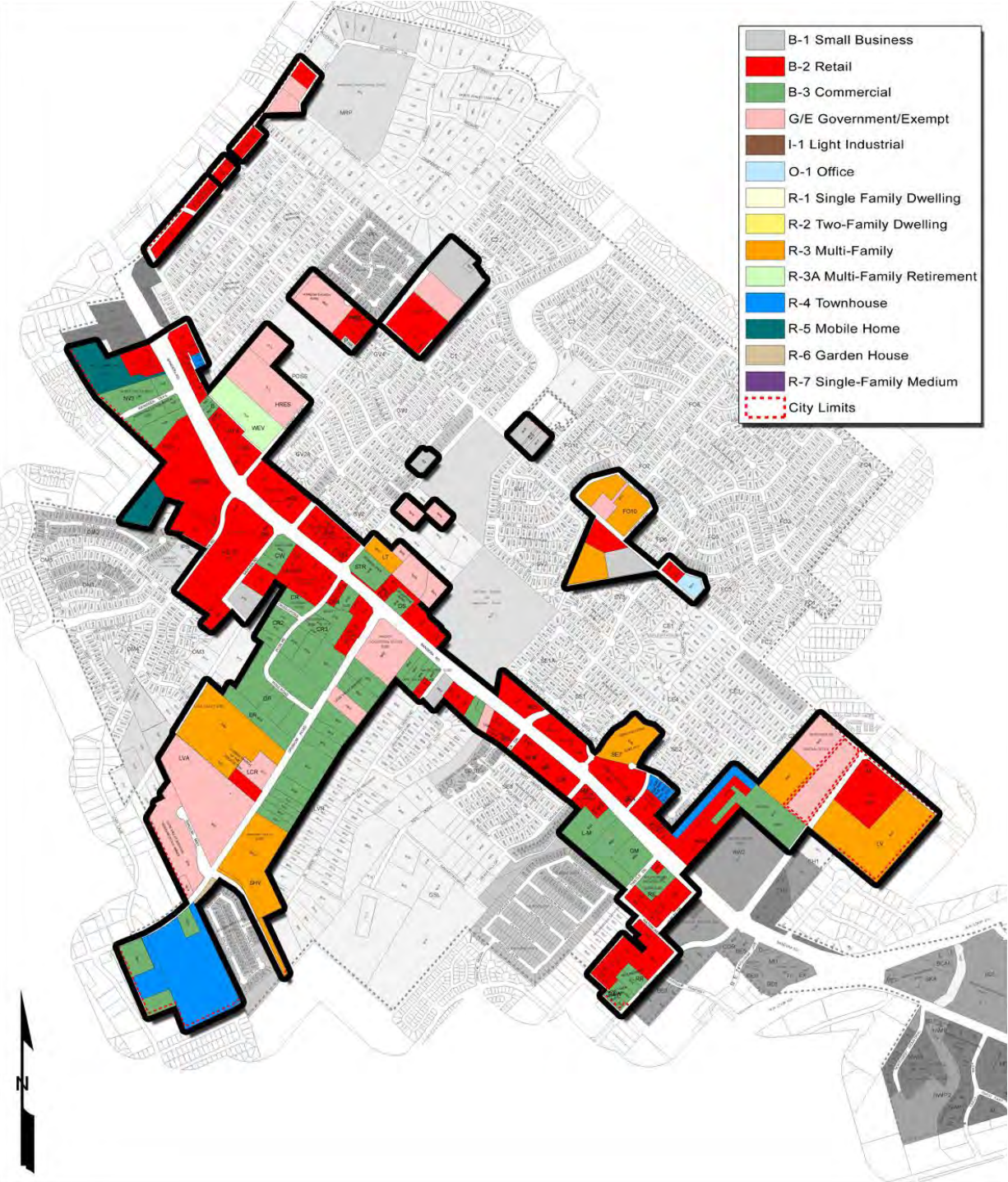


Figure 8: Leon Valley Sustainability Overlay District Map - City of Leon Valley Ordinance 10-025, Adopted July 2010



Figure 9: Leon Valley Streets Map - Google Maps

MARKET ASSESSMENT

REGIONAL ASSESSMENT

“Texas’ economy continued to outperform the U.S. economy with an annual growth rate of 2.5 percent from April 2010 to April 2011.”

– Monthly Review of the Texas Economy, May 2011

The south Texas economy has generally outperformed most of the United States during the current recession. The area continues to grow in population, with an increase of close to 20% in the 2000-2010 decade. Housing has expanded throughout the region, particularly in the northern areas of San Antonio and Bexar County. The growing population consists of large numbers of retirees, younger families, and military families, fueling a local housing and retail boom.

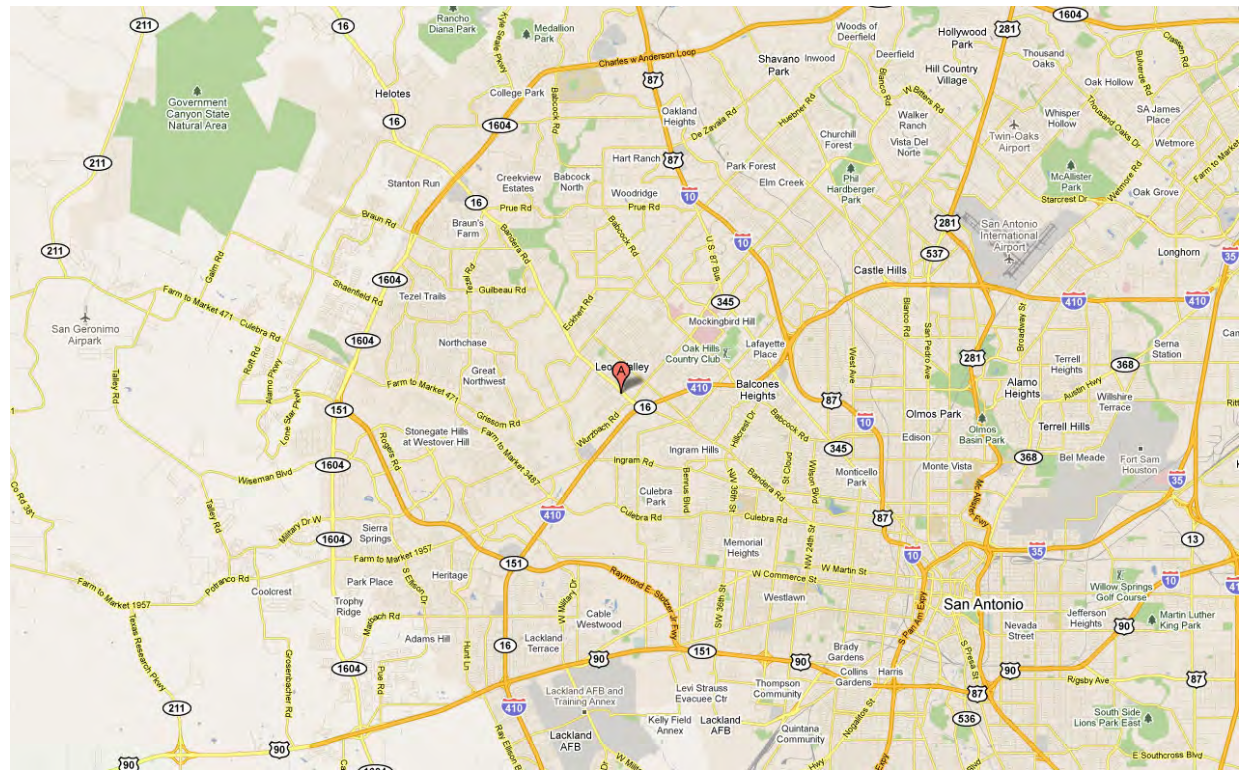


Figure 10: Regional Map

LEON VALLEY ASSESSMENT

The City of Leon Valley is located in Bexar County in southwest Texas, approximately 17 miles from the center of San Antonio, one of the state's largest cities. The city has a land area of 3.5 square miles and is completely surrounded by San Antonio. Approximately 90% of the land is developed. Leon Valley has a population of approximately 10,151 with a median household income of \$54,870.³

Leon Valley is strategically located in the northwest submarket of the San Antonio region. In addition, Leon Valley is located near regional attractions, such as Sea World of Texas and Six Flags Fiesta Texas. USAA insurance company and the San Antonio Port Authority—both large regional employers—are within easy commuting distance, and major education and medical facilities are located within a five to ten minute drive.⁴

LEON VALLEY DEMOGRAPHICS

In general, Leon Valley is a city of owner-occupied, single-family homes. The vacancy rates, both owner-occupied and rental are low: 1.4% and 4.8% according to the 2010 Census. With a 2010 population of 10,151, Leon Valley has a high level of diversity—approximately 56.2% of the population is Hispanic and 19% is minority. The population age generally skews towards the tail end of the spectrum, with 20.7% of the population under 18 and 16.9% age 65 or over. The current median household income is \$54,870.

3 U.S. Census, 2010 and U.S. Census 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

4 City of Leon Valley, TX, 2009 Comprehensive Master Plan.

MARKET ASSESSMENT

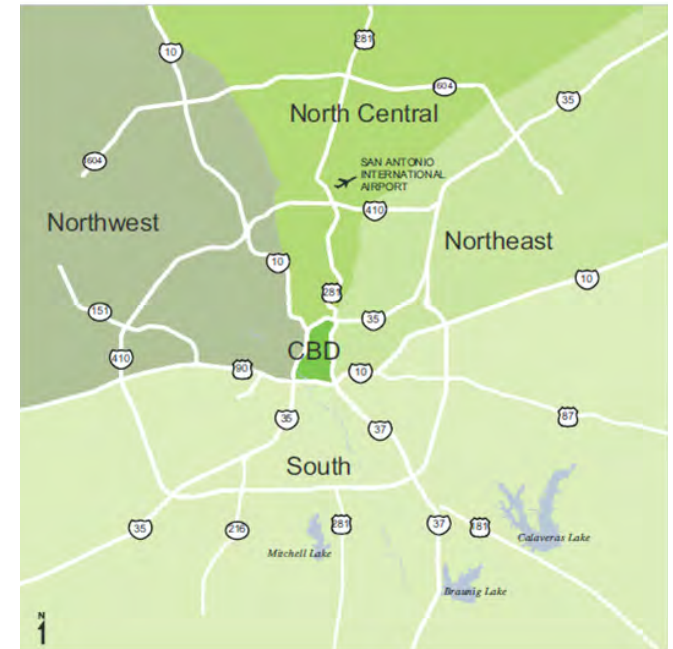


Figure 11: Submarket Map

MARKET ASSESSMENT

SECTOR ANALYSIS

2007 NAICS Code	Description	Number of Establishments	Sales, Shipments, and Receipts (\$1,000)	Annual Payroll (\$1,000)	Number of Employees
44-45	Retail trade	79	422,445	38,019	1,286
51	Information	7	N/A	2,445	112
53	Real estate and rental and leasing	19	25,945	1,733	63
54	Professional, scientific, and technical services	31	42,283	15,333	345
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Mang and Remediation Srvs	20	43,469	28,024	1,048
61	Educational services	3	595	164	13
62	Health care and social assistance	46	39,204	16,172	535
71	Arts, entertainment, and recreation	3	2,513	699	69
72	Accommodation and food services	41	28,600	8,144	662
81	Other services (except public administration)	39	19,955	6,220	312

Figure 12: Leon Valley Economic Sectors – U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Economic Census

Industrial Market ^{5,6}

The industrial market in the San Antonio region suffered some losses in the first quarter of 2011. This is mainly due to recent vacancies by a small number of large industrial tenants. While there appears to be an increase in interest and positive feelings from tenants and landlords, it is still a tenants' market with landlords continuing to give concessions. The northwest submarket, which includes Leon Valley, has one of the lowest vacancy rates and is known for its flex space (multiple use) which is demanded by the nearby medical and biotech facilities. While the reported vacancy rates for the northwest submarket vary from 7.6% to 16%, per square foot lease rates for warehouse and industrial space are in the high \$4 to low \$5 range, with Research and Development (R&D) and flex space going between the low \$9 to mid \$11 range.

Key Observations:

- Warehousing and distribution does not seem to fit the site context or zoning
- Access in and out of the site is limited for larger vehicles
- R&D and flex space may be a possibility given the proximity to key research, educational, and biomedical areas
- Leon Valley has targeted industrial development in its key industrial parks

5 Grubb & Ellis Industrial Trends Report – First Quarter 2011, San Antonio, TX.

6 CB Richard Ellis MarketView San Antonio, Industrial, First Quarter 2011.

MARKET ASSESSMENT

“Ground is not breaking on speculative buildings”

“Northwest submarket receives attention from users looking for flex property”

– CBRE MarketView – Industrial, Q1 2011

Construction (SF)

Under Construction ■ 0
Pre-leased ■ 0

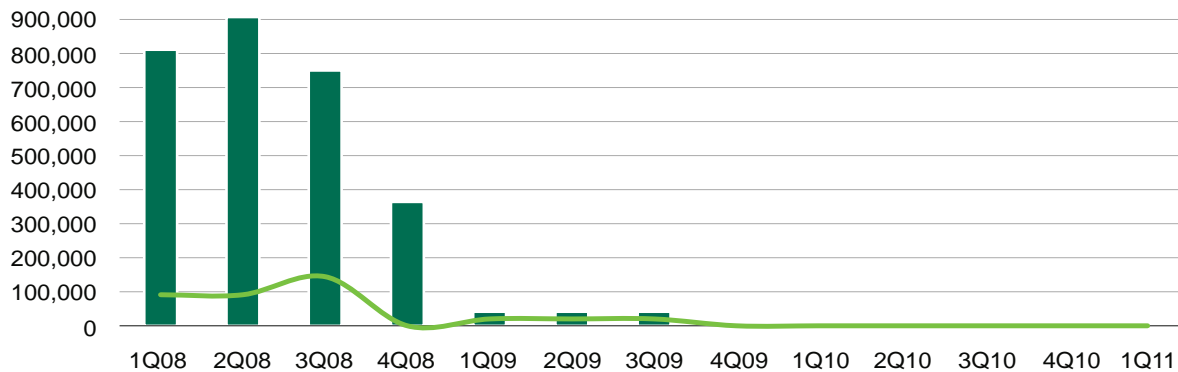


Figure 13: Construction in Northwest San Antonio Area – CBRE Marketview

MARKET ASSESSMENT

“Northwest submarket takes another step out as the place to be in San Antonio with new mixed-use development”

“Northwest typically marketed as an affordable and unassuming place to do business”

– CBRE MarketView – Industrial, Q1 2011

“Retail leakage occurs when residents shop outside the community. Leakage is reflected by an index less than 1.0 and a surplus is reflected by an index greater than 1.0.x”

– Buxton RMA, Retail Assessment for Leon Valley, Texas, April 2010

Figure 14: Leon Valley Retail Breakdown – Buxton RMA Retail Assessment 2010

Office Market ^{7,8}

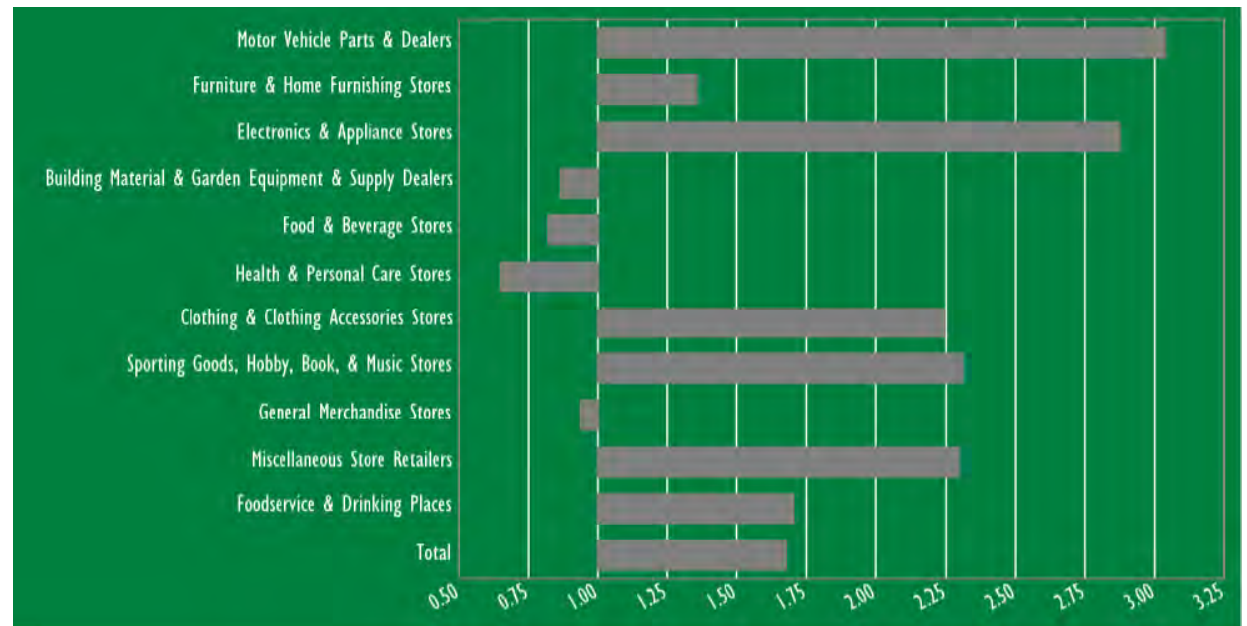
Class A office space appears to be leading the market, with particular interest in the northwest submarket. The new Eilan development includes Class A+ space and is being closely watched. It remains to be seen if the northwest, typically known as an affordable place to do business, can attract a higher-end user. Another trend that continues is companies owning and developing their own space, rather than leasing space in multi-tenant buildings. Current vacancy rates in the northwest submarket are reported to be between 14.8% and 18.5%, with Class A space reported as leasing at \$24.90 and Class B at \$18.05 per square foot. Most recently, the northwest has seen an increase in leasing rates due to its popularity.

Key Observations:

- Potential for additional office space
- Area known as an affordable area for businesses
- Class B space, that does not require high visibility and easy access, is a possibility

7 Grubb & Ellis Office Trends Report – First Quarter 2011, San Antonio, TX.

8 14 CB Richard Ellis MarketView San Antonio, Office, First Quarter 2011.



Source: Mosaic® USA is a registered trademark of Experian; Census Data. Data Source: Applied Geographic Solutions, 2000: Census Estimates and Projections 2008 Data

Retail

Currently, the Bandera Road corridor features predominantly retail use. According to Leon Valley's 2009 Master Plan, the city has 1,250,292 square feet of rentable retail, organized as strip centers or as stand-alone stores. A recent retail site assessment commissioned by the City of Leon Valley and completed by Buxton evaluated the viability of various retail uses. While the study focused on a specific site one mile northwest of the former Fiesta Dodge site, the analysis is extremely relevant.

The analysis revealed that Leon Valley had leakages in four areas:

- Health and Personal Care Stores
- Food and Beverage Stores
- Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supply Dealers
- General Merchandise Stores

The main drivers in these areas were outdoor power equipment stores, convenience stores, pharmacies and drug stores, and warehouse clubs and super stores.⁹

While the former Fiesta Dodge site is a large site, a recent trend in big box retail has been the downsizing of large retailers, such as Best Buy and Target.¹⁰ Bandera Road is experiencing a shift from large, quality retail stores to infill with smaller, lower quality, lower volume businesses. This change points to a need to consider a mix of retail type of uses for the site.

Key Observations:

- Additional retail may be possible, but it needs to differentiate itself
- Abundance of retail shopping center square footage
- Niche for affordable live/work/play
- Target workers traveling back and forth from the suburbs to downtown San Antonio

⁹ Buxton, Retail Site Assessment - Draft, Leon Valley, TX, April 2010.

¹⁰ Retail tenants still in the driving seat — for now, insiders say, San Antonio Business Journal, May 10, 2011. <http://www.bizjournals.com/sanantonio/blog/2011/05/retail-tenants-still-in-the-driving.html>

MARKET ASSESSMENT

Housing

There is less specific information available for multi-unit housing trends in the San Antonio region. In general, Class B and Class C space dominate the San Antonio market, but Class A and Class B space have the highest occupancy rates, 92.7% and 92.9%, respectively. In the first quarter of 2011, 80 units of housing have been completed in San Antonio, with 1,834 units under construction. Looking at the larger Texas housing market, a recent study by the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University states that Texas has done better compared to other states because of its lower housing costs.¹¹

According to data compiled by the Real Estate Center from the San Antonio Board of Realtors, the area between the Loop 410 and Loop 1604, which includes Leon Valley, had 62 sales with a median sales price of \$140,000 in March 2009, compared to 104 sales with a median price of \$133,200 in March 2010. However, the price per square foot increased from \$79 in 2009 to \$81 in 2010. In addition, the reported days on the market decreased from 106 in 2009 to 75 in 2010. The August 2009 and 2010 statistics show similar trends, but notably have a much shorter number of days on the market (68 in 2009 and 52 in 2010).¹²

Key Observations:

- Aging population may provide an opportunity for senior housing targeted at aging in place
- Housing is generally affordable
- Most housing units are single-family homes

¹¹ CB Richard Ellis Market Snapshot Texas, Office, First Quarter 2011.

¹² Real Estate Center, Texas A&M University, 2011 Texas Metro Market Overview, San Antonio-New Braunfels. <http://recenter.tamu.edu/mreports/2011/SanAntonio.pdf>

SUSTAINABILITY OVERLAY

The EPA technical assistance team developed several plans outlining potential reuse of the Fiesta Dodge site, showing typical development scenarios that might be appropriate under the city's Sustainability Overlay District. The plans were presented during a webinar conducted on June 9, 2011, attended by the City of Leon Valley, EPA Region 6, the owner's representatives, and several professionals familiar with the local development picture and the city's Sustainability Overlay District.

Key Features from Sustainability Ordinance

- Landscaping Requirements – street trees, screening, residential buffers
- Building Heights – Three stories maximum, four stories along Bandera Road, two and one-half stories adjacent to residential
- Setback Requirements – Minimum of six feet, maximum of 100 feet, minimum 30 feet from residential
- Parking Requirements – Current city standards, with possible reduction of 15% for shared access
- Site Development – More than 51% increase to development square footage triggers overlay compliance

REUSE MODELS



Figure 15: Green Street Could Create Pedestrian Scale

REUSE MODELS

SUSTAINABILITY OVERLAY DISTRICT

The plan shows the elements of the Sustainability Overlay District as applied to the Fiesta Dodge property, including minimum and maximum street setbacks from Bandera Road, required setbacks from Thistle Road and the neighboring subdivision, and height limitations on buildings at various locations. This drawing, which also shows the existing buildings and site contours, formed the basis for evolving redevelopment models for the property.

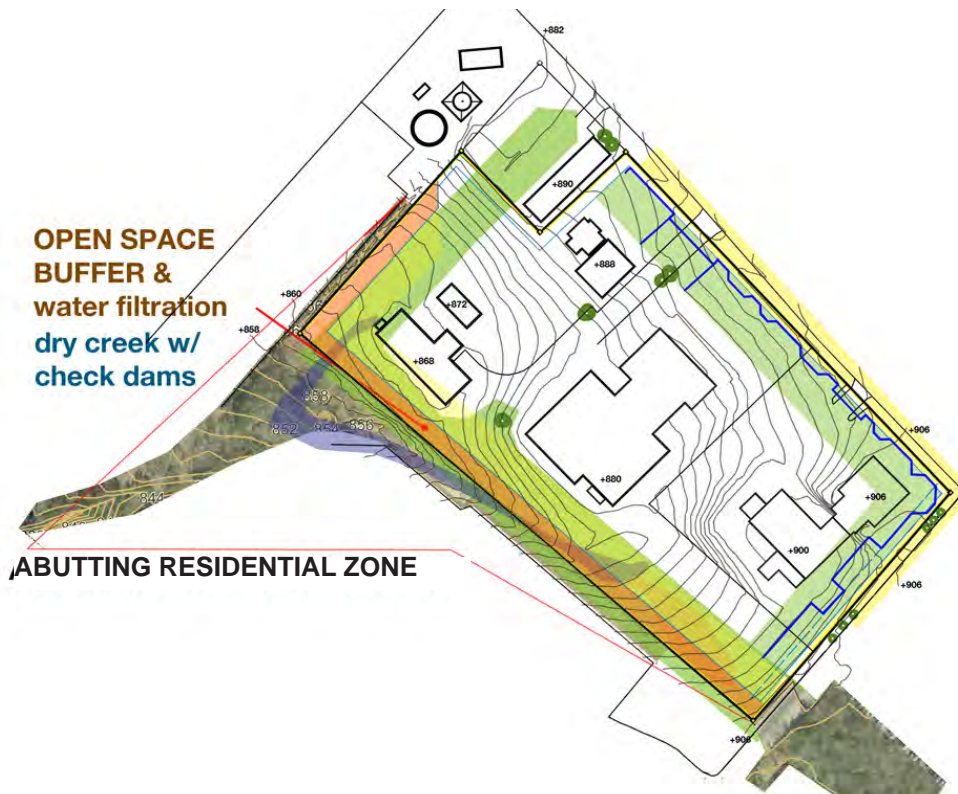


Figure 16: Sustainability Overlay District Requirements

Site Hydrology Diagram

A second illustration shows how the small drainage channel at the rear of the site might play an expanded function in future site hydrology. Treated as a dry creek, with check dams to break flows during storm events, the channel could capture small storms and filter water through riparian vegetation. The channel, which abuts the neighboring residential subdivision, could create a visual buffer to the property, which is currently lacking. The channel, which would be mainly dry except during storms, would create a linkage to tributaries of Huebner Creek.

The diagram shows smaller buildings left for possible reuse and with the rear of the site left as a potential stormwater channel. The blue line indicates possible building articulation along Bandera Road, meeting the Sustainability Overlay District requirements for varied building facades.



REUSE MODELS

Figure 17: Strategy to Restore Site Hydrology

REUSE MODELS

Site Circulation and Parking

An analysis of the likely site circulation was created. Two access points were feasible from Bandera Road and up to two access drives from Thistle Road. The main entrance and exit are shown as a boulevard with multiple turnarounds at different distances into the site. Other roadways are one way to simplify traffic routing and minimize the potential for cross-traffic and accidents. Under this scheme, service access is provided from Thistle Road, though service vehicles could also enter and exit using Bandera Road.

All parking shown is surface parking to illustrate the point that the site accommodates a large amount of parking and the rough footprint that development spaces might occupy. Green bands indicate vegetated stormwater management swales or treed parking islands.

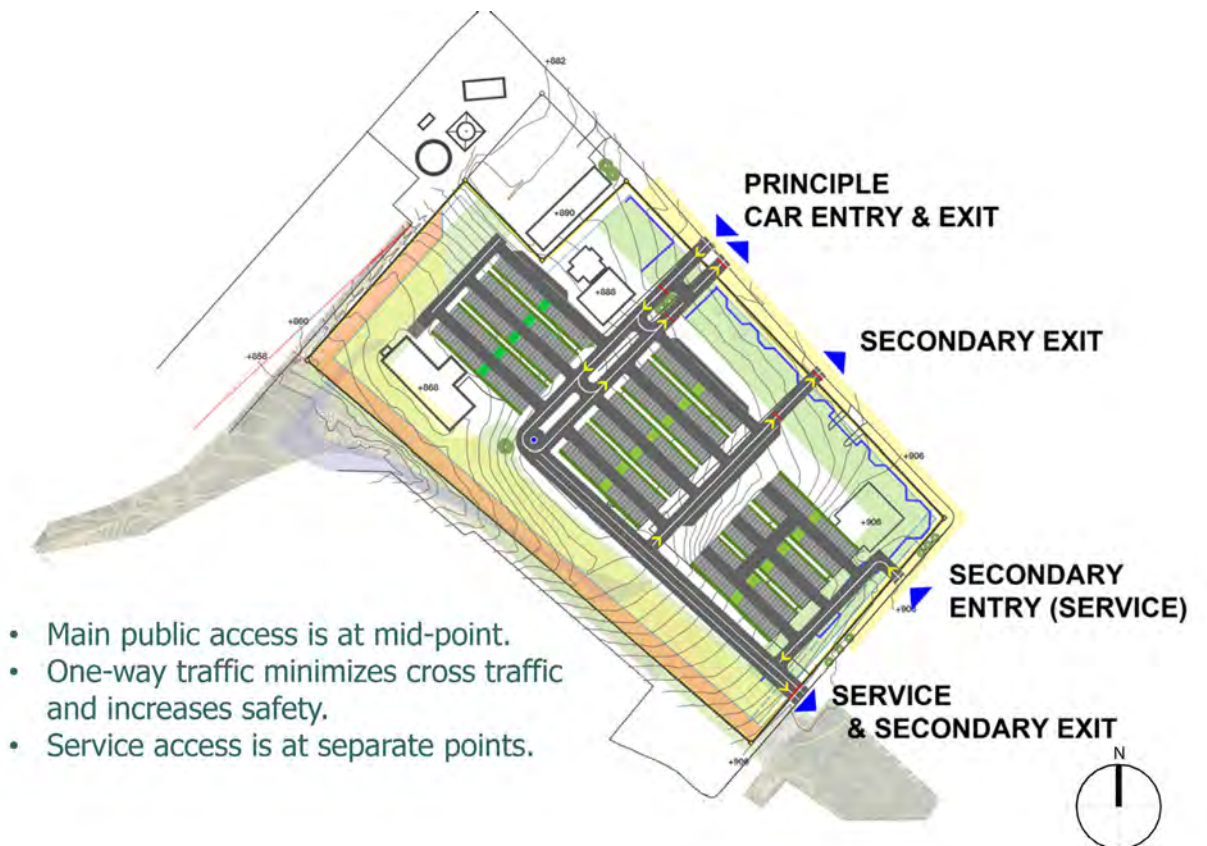
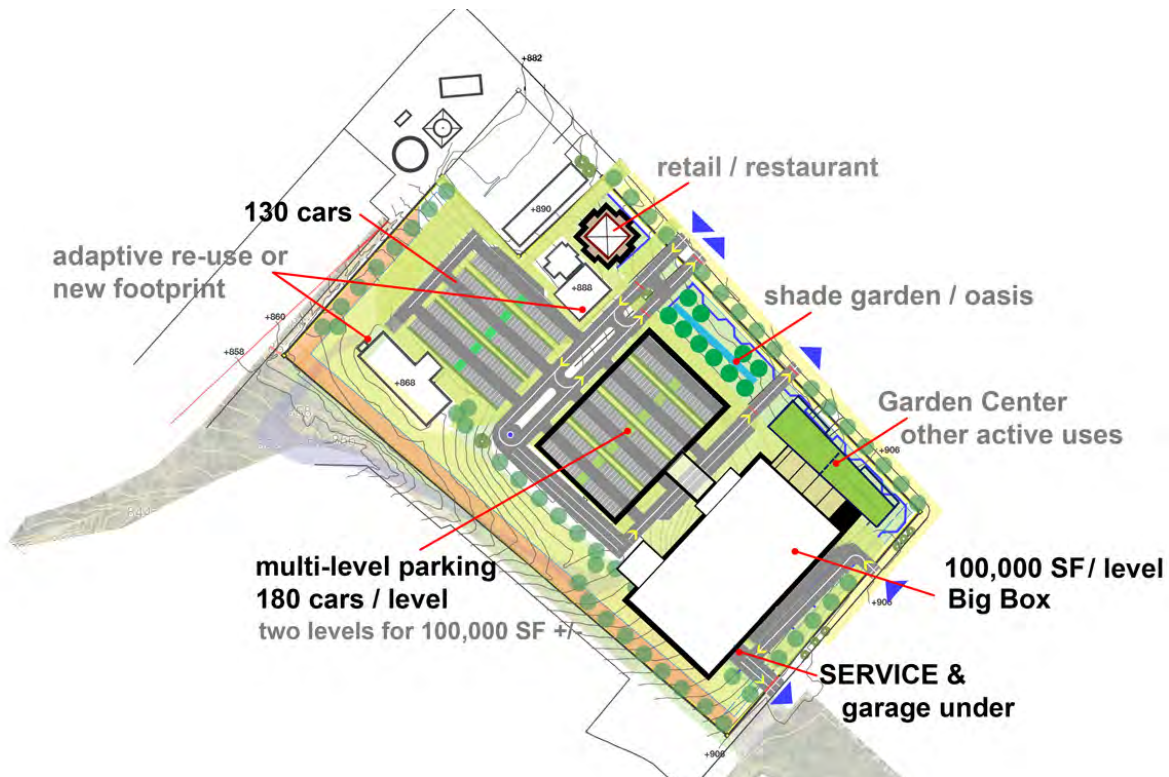


Figure 18: Site Circulation and Parking

REGIONAL BIG BOX

As noted before, the retail market here is trending away from very large retail construction, but the parcel size and location suggests that a large retail store might still be a potential anchor along Bandera Road. The diagram shows how a big box retail store could fit within the Sustainability Overlay by locating uses such as a garden center, café or restaurant along the streetscape to create an active pedestrian space along Bandera Road. Parking could be accommodated as surface parking (310 spaces) or multi-level garage (490+ spaces). Internal circulation by means of green streets, canopy trees, and Low Impact Design (LID) stormwater will help meet the requirements of the Sustainability Overlay.



REUSE MODELS

Figure 19: Regional Big Box Schematic Diagram

REUSE MODELS

NEW FOOTPRINT

If a single big box is not a viable retail use, the property could accommodate several buildings served by a structured parking. An office building or hotel could front Bandera Road – up to four stories, or 200,000 square feet is permissible under the Sustainability Overlay. Two building footprints of up to 180,000 square feet, located behind the office building, could contain parking on the lower levels, served by an access drive from Thistle Road. Additional surface parking could serve smaller buildings, possibly adaptively reusing the existing buildings.



Figure 20: Stormwater Planter

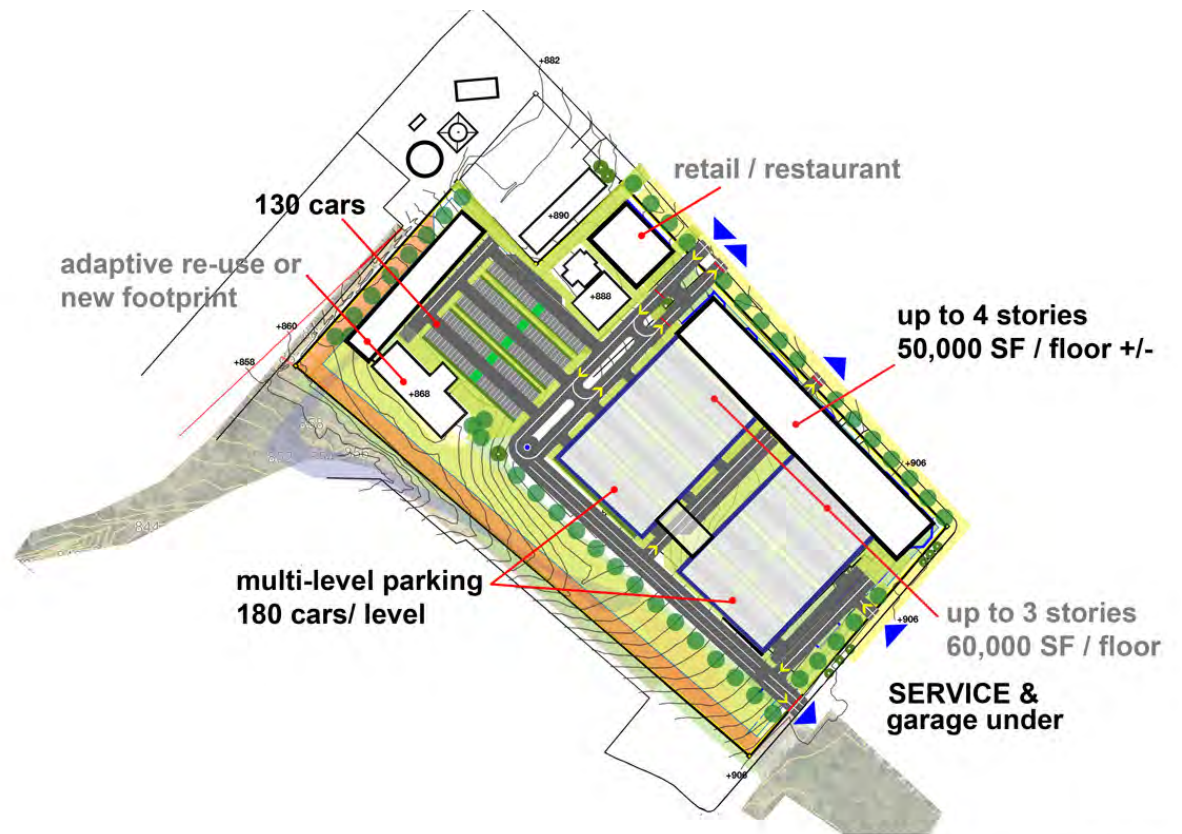


Figure 21: New Footprint Schematic Diagram

Summary observations from reuse models:

- The site can be developed in phases
- The development can fulfill Sustainability Overlay criteria
- Parking landscape and other “Green Infrastructure” features can provide water capture and stormwater filtration for typical storm event
- Parking requirements establish “upper limit” of build out

POTENTIAL REUSE FEATURES

In addition to the reuse models, a number of potential features could be included to enhance the site. Adaptively reusing the existing buildings and recycling prevalent materials, such as asphalt, could enhance the site’s sustainability.

Other potential sustainable redevelopment features might include:

- Harvest site rainwater for reuse in the landscape
- Save land/energy/materials with compact building footprints
- Re-establish natural water flow and hydrology with internal swales and dry detention swale at lower part of site
- Create pedestrian comfort and building shading with trees and shade structures
- Reduce car/truck idling with efficient internal traffic flow
- Reduce automobile use with mass transit connections

REUSE MODELS



Figure 22: Nearby Hotel with Stormwater Capture Cistern



Figure 23: San Antonio Municipal Building with Air Conditioning Condensate Reuse

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP



Figure 24: A Breakout Group Discusses Site Reuse Options During the Community Workshop

PURPOSE

A community workshop was held on August 31, 2011, in Leon Valley to explore options for future adaptive reuse and redevelopment of the Fiesta Dodge site. The workshop was interactive, with a panel of local technical experts participating in group breakouts to create diagrams of potential reuse options. Breakout sessions were followed by a lunch and summary from the participants, with invited guests from the community present during the later session.

PARTICIPANTS AND AGENDA

Mayor Chris Riley and City Manager Manuel Langoria, Jr. provided opening remarks and introductions for an invited panel of professional technical participants, including local developers, planners, architects, and market niche specialists.

The workshop agenda was based around active participation by the invited panel and smaller breakout group sessions to explore specific reuse options. As a framework for the session, a slide show of market assessment and site options was presented. A group discussion among the technical participants followed and focused quickly on the range of opportunities and marketable uses for the site, as well as challenges presented by the site conditions and economic outlook.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

In general, most participants felt that the existing buildings were not suitable for reuse given their specific function and condition, and that a new owner would probably want to start by demolishing most or all the current buildings. The site's topographic slope and lack of visibility from northbound Bandera Road were mentioned as significant obstacles to any retail-based development. The city's Sustainability Overlay was cited as restricting some options, due to its limitations on building height and increased density.

Opportunities And Challenges

In terms of specific reuse options, the initial response from two of the developers present was that a big box type development would not be a logical option because the site was not large enough. Similarly, a grocery anchor such as the local HEB chain would require a larger property. Other uses, such as industrial or warehouse were considered infeasible, due to the probable cost of reconfiguring the buildings and site. Office use, particularly medical office was thought to be a possibility; however, the nearby market is fairly saturated.

The following development challenges are summarized from session notes:

- Off ramp from 410 limits visibility and access to site
- Slope steepness and extent of pavement limits potential development uses
- Site is at a mid-block location vs. corner – need to pull out into moving traffic
- Need to address remnant buildings from former car dealership
- Retail use considered not marketable – too many vacancies, low rents in area
- Commercial uses (e.g., medical offices) have other locations to move to along Bandera Road.
- “Tweeners” – in-between size is too small to be a retail anchor, too big to be a neighborhood retail outlet
- Zoning overlay limits potential uses – height restrictions counter hotel, other uses
- Auto dealership use specifically prohibited by overlay, market uncertain anyway

In terms of development opportunities, the developers and professional participants felt that a mixed-use housing development, including multi-family, was overall the likeliest reuse option. Mixed use was thought to be the best fit under the Sustainability Overlay, especially if a new mass transit route could provide frequent and rapid service. The participants then split up into smaller working groups to consider more detailed options and develop draft schematic diagrams of the various proposals.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

“Maybe the city ought to step back and say do we want to have a vision for today, or do we want to have a vision for 5, 10, 20 years from now?”

– Mark Granados, GFR Development

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Breakout Discussions

A summary of site opportunities was captured during the breakout group discussions. Site potential focused on reuse under the current Sustainability Overlay as primarily housing and supporting retail, with the existing buildings demolished. The comments listed here were taken directly from video and flipcharts.

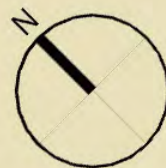
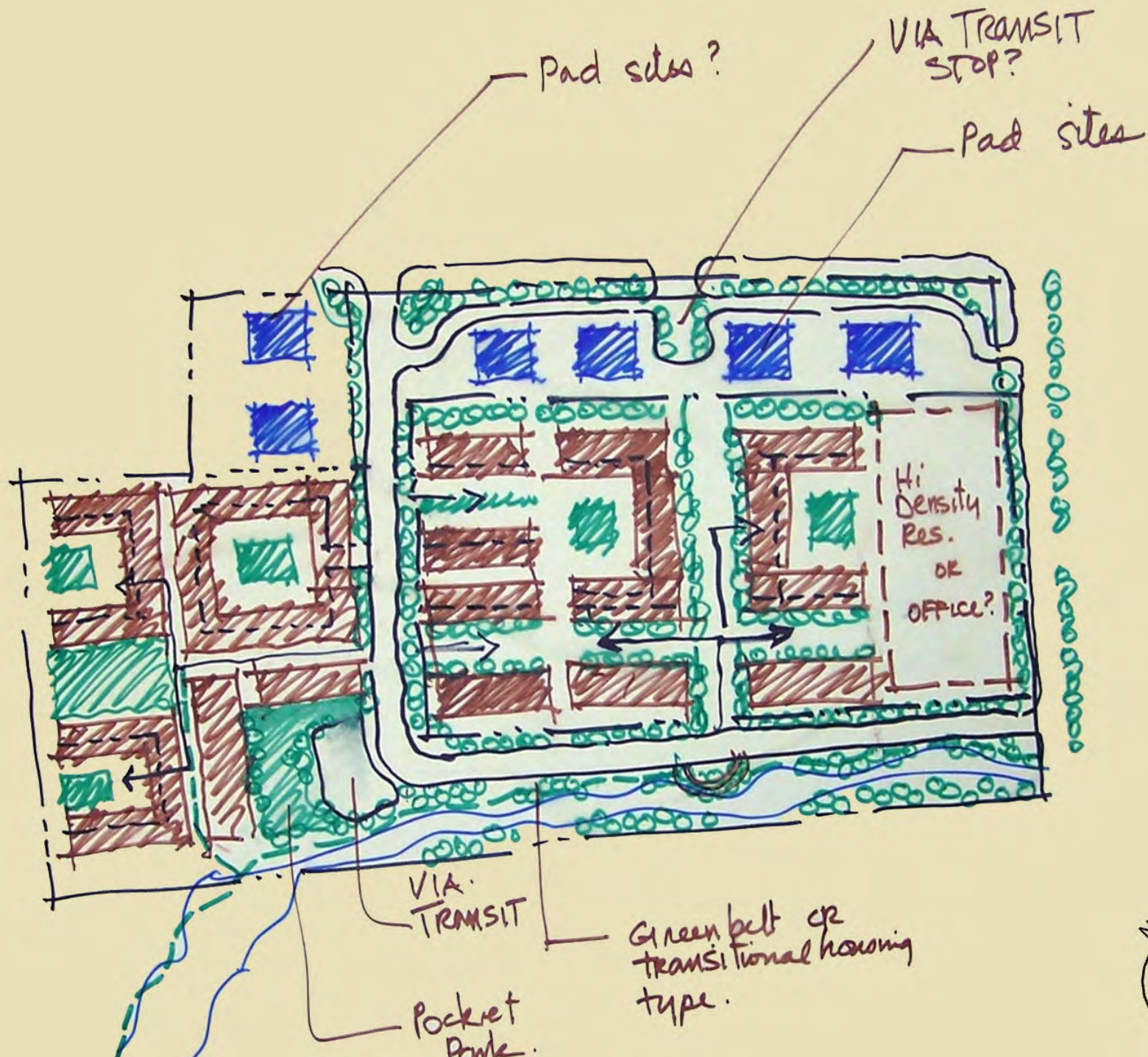


Figure 25: Former Mayor Irene Baldrige, Current Mayor Chris Riley and Andrew Douglas of Douglas Architects Listen During the Breakout Group Session

- Multifamily housing, push density with three to four story buildings, more floors at rear
- “Barbell” market of opposites on age spectrum – retirees and young people
- Increase variety of housing stock available in Leon Valley
- Easiest catalyst for change, improvement
- 80-90% housing with remaining retail and small commercial (e.g., medical offices)
- Buffer at rear of site, connect to local greenbelt
- Linkage can provide hike-bike path
- Could be part of first phase, city does it, selling point for property
- New streetscape palette for city with internal complete streets
- Public-private partnership with city is essential
- Stormwater collection at west end in low point, basis for pocket park
- Multifamily uses can readily incorporate low impact landscape (sustainable water management) throughout site
- Will spend more on engineering design
- Buyers don’t really recognize sustainable aspects
- No structured parking, all surface parking with green islands
- Discussions with VIA Metropolitan Transit (a mass transit agency serving San Antonio) important, potential transit stop for Bus Rapid Transit connection

Additionally, participants felt that the city may want to consider financial incentives for site redevelopment. Several thoughts surfaced during this discussion:

- City ought to consider the property a community showcase of the Sustainability Overlay and develop site themselves
- City offers a full or partial tax abatement, depending on final reuse
- City considers tax increment financing, assuming a portion devoted to retail use
- City waives development fees and/or expedites development permits
- Leon Valley Economic Development Corporation works in partnership with developer



COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

PLANS AND SKETCHES

Several plans were produced by breakout participants, illustrating potential reuse options for the Fiesta Dodge site. Two main options surfaced, one showing primarily housing and one showing a hotel and conference center anchoring the site. A third, less developed option placed the housing at the rear of the site and located transit in a more central location.

1. Multi-family housing with mixed use
2. Hotel/conference center with retail
3. Apartment/retail option

Multi-Family Housing With Mixed Use

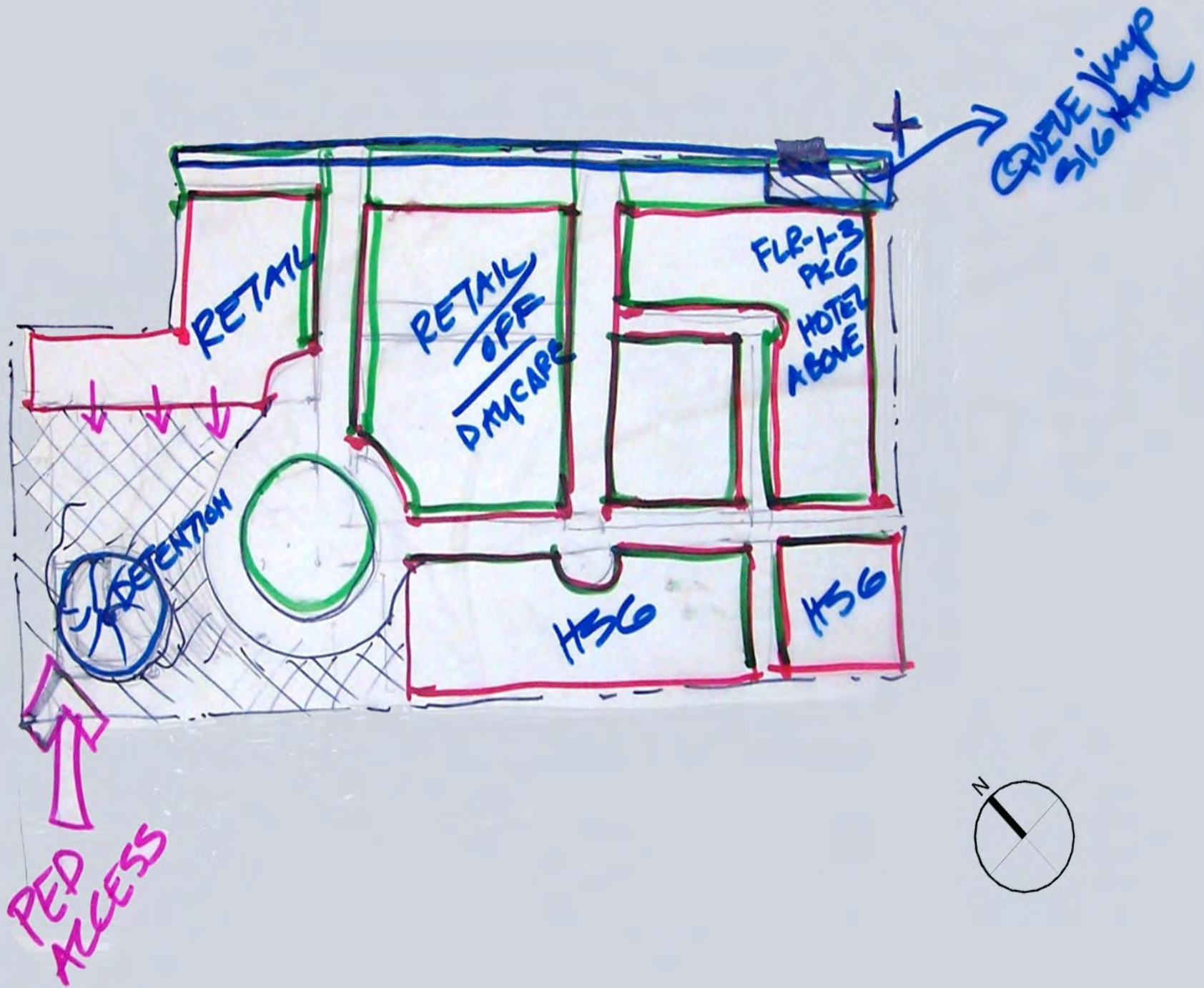
The main use of the site, as shown in Figure 27, is multi-family housing, with commercial frontage. Commercial properties are neighborhood stores or medical offices in the range of 10,000 – 20,000 square feet. The central part of the site is multi-family housing, two-three stories in height, arranged with surface parking in a courtyard fashion. Space is left on the eastern end for a 40,000-50,000 square foot high density residential or office building. The height for this building is limited to four stories by the Sustainability Overlay, though participants pointed out that a taller building could anchor the site and attract greater development possibilities.

The site is accessed from a single entrance/exit on Bandera Road and two access points on Thistle Road. The property is served by a VIA Metropolitan Transit bus line, connected to the planned Bus Rapid Transit line on Fredericksburg Road. A greenbelt that also serves a stormwater collection function was common to both housing plans and borders the residential development to the southwest. A pocket park that captures and disperses stormwater is situated near the low point of the property. Complete streets that accommodate pedestrians and cyclists as well as cars, provide access to all of the buildings and parking areas, and form the ring road surrounding the buildings.



Figure 26: Jim Carillo, AICP, Halff Associates, Sketches a Housing Plan

Figure 27: Multi-Family Housing Sketch from Workshop
(Opposite Page)



COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Hotel/Conference Center With Retail

“Complete Streets – the idea of complete streets or connected streets is really critical, if you want to have a demonstration project for this, it’s a good spot to build a really cool street that is pedestrian oriented so all these people can get out of the apartments and walk to the bus stop, or use a wheelchair.”

– David Aldeman of AREA Group

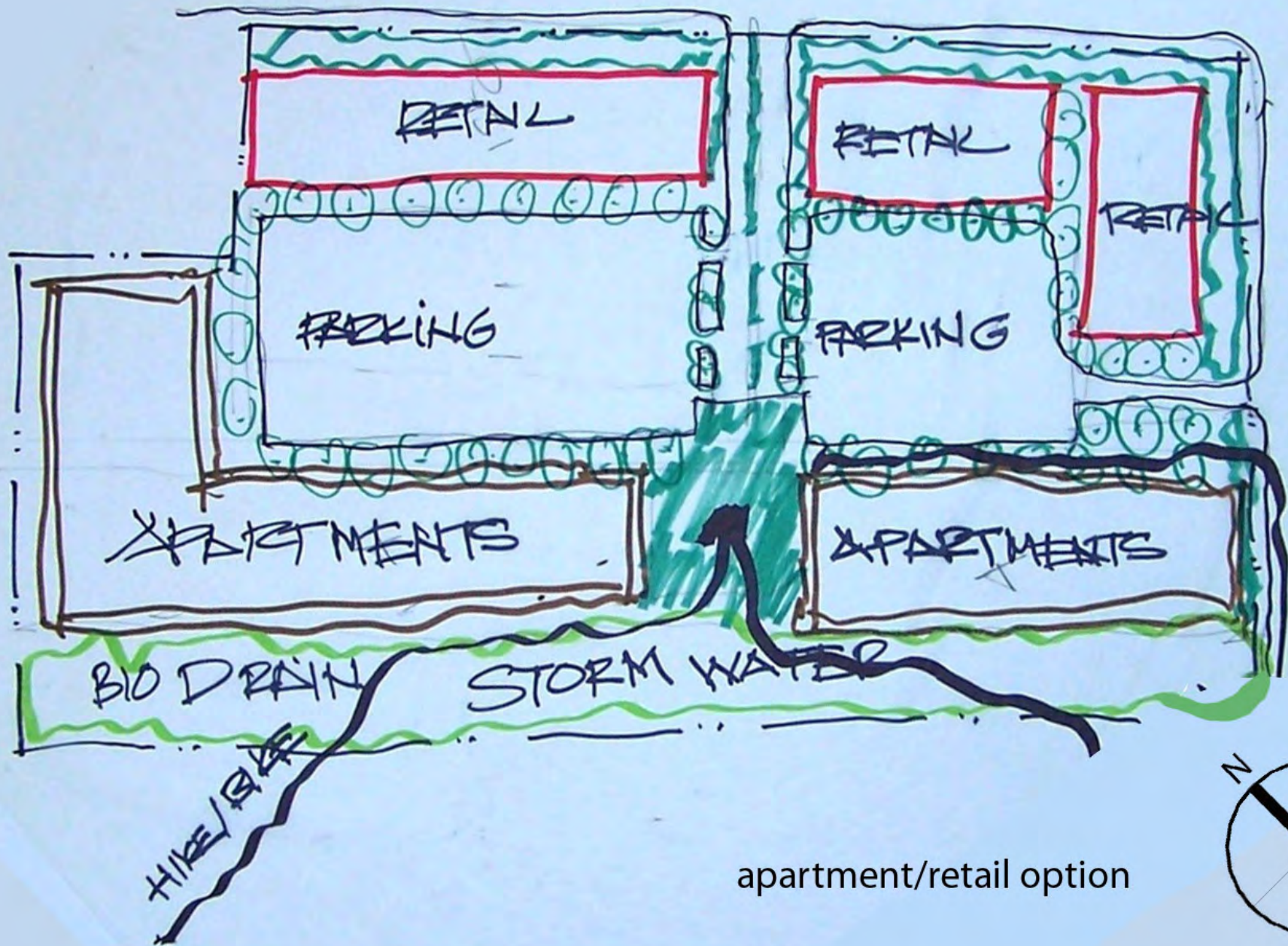


Figure 28: Christine Viña, VIA Metropolitan Transit, Presents the Hotel/Retail Plan

This option, shown in Figure 29, was developed around a large park, approximately three acres in size, with hardscape, a rainwater detention feature, and a circular open space that could be a gathering spot or simply a planted space. Retail and office space front Bandera Road and one of the three main access roads to the site. A hotel building occupying a footprint of approximately 70,000 square feet with associated parking, anchors the east corner of the site. The hotel has one to three floors of parking on the lower level with hotel rooms above; however, this does not conform to the current Sustainability Overlay. The hotel and site have VIA Metropolitan Transit access from a signalized pulloff on Bandera Road, allowing bus drivers to control the signal and enter the traffic lane.

The discussion noted that the VIA Metropolitan Transit buses could enter the site and pick up passengers at the roundabout in the park space. This scheme showed the park space and stormwater detention as an important feature inside the site, instead of along the southwestern side adjacent to the neighboring subdivision.

Figure 29: Hotel/Conference Center with Retail Plan (Opposite Page)



apartment/retail option

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Apartment/Retail Option

The main use of the site shown in Figure 32 is multi-family housing, with approximately 100,000 square feet of retail (commercial) frontage. Commercial properties are about 20,000 square feet in size and could be neighborhood businesses or medical offices. The central part of the site is surface parking, which serves both retail and apartment use and is surrounded by trees and plantings. Large apartment buildings of 50,000-75,000 square feet (or could be multiple smaller buildings) occupy the rear of the site.

The property is accessed by a central boulevard from Bandera Road and one access point from Thistle Road. The boulevard leads directly to a green space at the center of the property between the apartment buildings. The green space is the internal focus of the site and connects to a stormwater capture/bioretention swale, as well as to a hike-bike trail leading to nearby recreation trails.



Figure 30: Emil Moncivais, FAICP, Town Planning and Design, Draws a Mixed Use Option



Figure 31: Salado Creek Hike-Bike Greenway Trail

Figure 32 : Apartment/Retail Diagram from Workshop (Opposite Page)

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Several factors emerged during the workshop that the group felt would drive redevelopment opportunities. Limited access and visibility from Bandera Road limits the potential for commercial retail development. The Texas Department of Transportation currently has no plans to change the traffic pattern on Bandera Road, so it is not likely that it will be downsized to a lower volume thoroughfare or converted into a limited access street.

The current use as an auto dealership is not a viable reuse option because the Sustainability Overlay District disallows auto-related uses. Though reuse of the current buildings was mentioned at several times during the workshop, nearly all participants felt that this option was not feasible. The Sustainability Overlay District was not uniformly considered a barrier to development; several participants noted that the height restriction could restrict high-density options, hindering opportunities to create an urban setting. The main barrier at present is the overall economic environment, in which numerous available office spaces compete with potential future development. The “in-between” size of the parcel—too small for a grocery or big box, too large for neighborhood retail—limited creative options for reuse.

Housing, either for rental or sale, was generally seen as the most viable catalyst for change of use and improvement. Demand exists for multi-family residences, including newer concepts of extended family domiciles that are a response to the current economic recession, as families move back together under one roof.

Designs for internal streetscapes could consider a “complete streets” concept as a way to differentiate a housing development from the competition. The complete streets concept for active living could generate an interesting framework for a senior living center, for example. The sloping site could be terraced to create a diversity of internal views and multi-level spaces, which could add considerable variety to a multi-family housing concept.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS LEARNED



Figure 33: Group Participates in Q&A During the Wrap Up Session

SUMMARY AND LESSONS LEARNED



Figure 34: Leon Valley Water Tower as Seen from Site

INTERIM PLANNING

A viable way forward is for Leon Valley to create a public-private partnership with one or more developers. Several options exist for this type of partnership. One possibility is for the city to have an arm's length relationship with a developer through tax increment financing, expedited permits, tax abatements, or some other financial assistance.

Another possibility is for the city to apply to EPA for assistance with Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments in order to give a future buyer a clearer path to development. This alternative would probably require the city to purchase a development option from the current owner in order to gain continuous access to the site.

Following environmental clearance from EPA, the city could work as an active partner with a developer and build initial infrastructure on the site. Infrastructure might include parts of the internal road system, stormwater management, green infrastructure, pocket parks, and the greenway trail connection. The city could construct these elements as a demonstration of sustainable design opportunities that meet the overlay requirements.

Some form of public-private partnership would seem to be an essential component for supporting a closed automobile dealership redevelopment effort. In a slow economy with reduced consumer demand, municipalities may not want to wait for the market to turn around. Many communities, like Leon Valley, possess dealership strip malls, where a half dozen or more dealerships coexist along a major corridor. Faced with the prospect of several dealerships turning vacant, municipalities need to be creative with incentive programs and an array of reuse alternatives. Options such as special financing, tax abatements, and expedited development approvals are fundamental to redevelopment; however, a partnership where both parties are invested is likely necessary to jump start a more innovative approach to reuse.

LESSONS LEARNED

Like Fiesta Dodge, most closed automobile dealerships are privately owned. Some suggestions to consider when working with a municipality interested in sustainable development of private property are:

- Seek and secure active cooperation of owner (or owner representatives) at earliest opportunity.
- Factor in sufficient time for owner, municipality and local community organization to meet, discuss and raise issues and concerns about changing use from automobile dealership to another reuse that is sustainable within the locale or geographic area. Allow a minimum of six months to 12 months for this process.
- Meet frequently with owner, municipality and local community organizations – in person (budget allowing), via conference call, webinar or video conference to air conflicts or issues, and reach a resolution that all parties can support.

Municipal governments have legislative powers that include modifications to zoning and building codes to create a Sustainability Overlay. When a Sustainability Overlay is placed on private property, it may have an effect on future sale of the property. Some suggestions to consider are:

- A presentation and briefing about the key elements of Sustainability Overlay needs to be developed and presented to all stakeholders—owner, commercial real estate brokers in the area, and local economic developers by either the municipality or municipality’s consultant, community activists, and other local business owners.
- It is important to remember that everyone involved will not necessarily share the same perception of the value of a Sustainability Overlay.

SUMMARY AND LESSONS LEARNED

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