





Chapter 1  
**INTRODUCTION**

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 A Plan as Unique as Albuquerque & Bernalillo County

In the heart of central New Mexico, Albuquerque and Bernalillo County have been shaped over centuries by a unique geology, natural setting, and settlement by Native American, Spanish, Anglo, and other cultures. This rich history contributes to the physical and social fabric of our region. Our physical and cultural distinctiveness provides the foundation for many of our residents' identity, our sense of place, and our quality of life.

The area's beautiful and diverse landscape encompasses the Rio Grande Valley and surrounding Bosque, volcanoes on the West Mesa, and forested Sandia Mountains to the east. Complemented by a mild and sunny climate, this landscape provides breathtaking vistas and countless year-round outdoor activities including hiking, skiing, biking, camping, equestrian sports, and wildlife watching. Residents and tourists alike are attracted to the vibrant and deeply rooted arts and culture scene and the famous New Mexico cuisine that melds the region's historic Hispanic and native heritages. Compared to many other regions,

our residents enjoy a low cost of living and manageable traffic, further contributing to our high quality of life.

This Plan refers to the city and unincorporated area of Bernalillo County as the "Albuquerque area" – not to elevate the City's concerns or neglect the needs and contributions of county and rural areas, but rather to recognize the interdependence of rural and urban areas that contribute to the future success of the larger metropolitan area. The Albuquerque area offers a range of lifestyles from urban to rural, which is part of what gives our community its sense of place and makes our economy diverse and robust.

The Albuquerque area is the state's largest population center, accounting for over 675,000 people.<sup>1</sup> The city and county are part of a larger metropolitan area of nearly one million residents, which comprises neighboring Sandoval, Valencia, and Torrance counties.



Image credit: Bill Tondreau

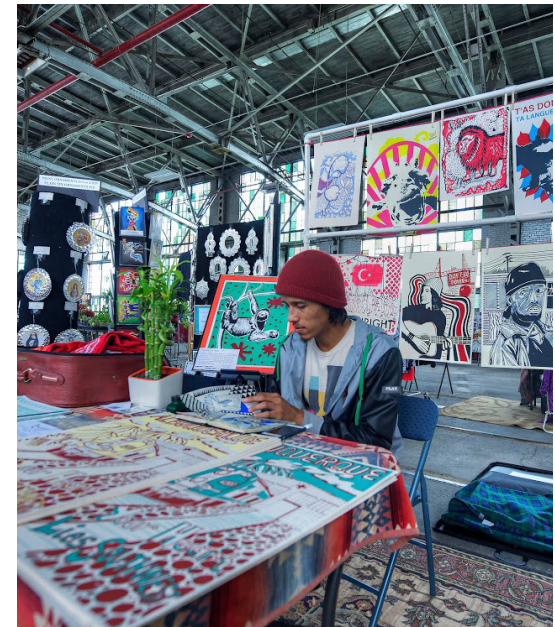


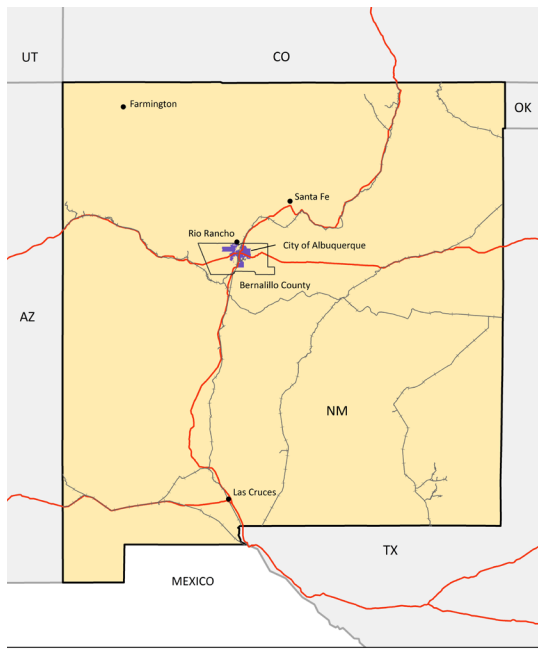
Image credit: Sean Poitras

*A community steeped in culture and surrounded by natural features.*

Centered on the intersection of Interstate 40 and Interstate 25 and home to two airports and a regional rail system, the area is also the state’s primary transportation and commercial hub. The convergence of transportation systems here connects the region and our economy to the rest of the state, nation, and other countries.

Albuquerque serves as an educational center, home to prestigious higher education institutions including the University of New

By 2040, the population of the Albuquerque area is expected to increase by 311,000 people, representing a 46% increase from 2012.



**Figure 1-1: Location Map of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County**



*The Albuquerque area is a vibrant and growing community.*



Image credit: City of Albuquerque



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Mexico, the Central New Mexico Community College, and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute. We are also home to the largest concentration of hospitals and medical providers in the state, which supports the local population and draws patients from across the Southwest.

By 2040, the population of the Albuquerque area is expected to increase by 311,000 people, representing a 46 percent increase from 2012,<sup>2</sup> and we need to accommodate this growth in a sustainable way. The long-term vitality and happiness of our residents hinge on thoughtfully locating, designing, and integrating new places for residents and businesses in a way that reflects our vision for the future. This will help us preserve what we love most about our region, while preparing for future challenges and working to secure prosperity for the next generation.

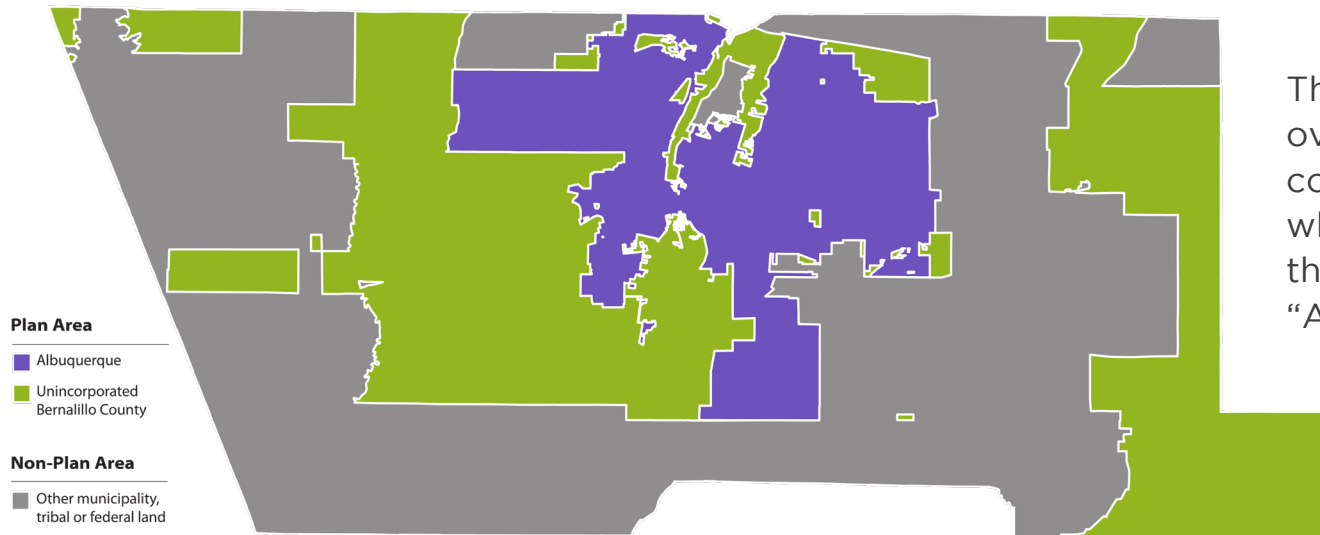
Several ongoing planning efforts make us proud, like protecting and enhancing the region's parks and natural areas, successful water conservation efforts, and revitalization in Downtown, Uptown, 4th Street, Sawmill, and Central Avenue. Other issues threaten the livability of our city and county and require our attention:



Image credit: City of Albuquerque

*Residents take pride in their community and heritage.*

- **Economic development:** Although the region is relatively affordable, it is also recovering slowly from the 2008 recession. As population grows, we need to ensure that the economy grows with it and promotes prosperity for everyone.
- **Water:** In our dry climate, supporting new and existing residents also means that we have to manage our water resources sustainably in the face of climate change.
- **Environmental justice:** After making significant gains in protecting our natural environment, we will need to continue to develop and implement strategies to address the environmental health hazards that affect vulnerable populations more severely in some areas of our community.
- **Housing affordability and services:** The number of households experiencing poverty is increasing. Ensuring access to quality affordable housing and health and social services for families and individuals is critical.
- **Connectivity:** While transit ridership has increased significantly in the past decade, many people still lack convenient access to transit, and pedestrians and cyclists face poor connectivity and threats to their safety.



This Plan has jurisdiction over unincorporated county and city land, which is referred to throughout as the “Albuquerque area.”

Figure 1-2: Geographic Scope of the Comp Plan

## 1.2 Geographic Scope of the Plan

The Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) guides growth and development within Albuquerque’s municipal limits and the unincorporated portions of Bernalillo County. Unincorporated Bernalillo County includes federal lands, such as Cibola National Forest, but does not include Kirtland Air Force Base, tribal lands, or other municipalities.

Although neighboring jurisdictions are not directly addressed in this Plan, coordination is

managed through the regional transportation planning organization, the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG), which includes Bernalillo, Sandoval, Valencia, and Torrance counties.

## 1.3 Benefits & Limits of Comprehensive Plans

The Comp Plan is primarily a land use document. It has the power to shape land use and zoning decisions as the Rank 1 Master Plan for both Albuquerque and

Bernalillo County. While a comprehensive plan can suggest priorities for economic development or housing, it only has direct influence over land use decisions. At the same time, the distinctive benefit of comp plans is how they identify and confront significant issues in a holistic way. Rank 2 and Rank 3 City and County plans are more focused and deal with topics such as parks, solid waste, transportation, or smaller geographic areas. Only a comprehensive plan fully considers how the whole community’s values, needs, people, and places are interrelated and interdependent.

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This Comp Plan identifies issues that are central to the region’s future success and describes how we can preserve and enhance the special places we value, even as we grow and evolve.

The Comp Plan provides goals and policies in each topic area to guide private development land use decisions, relevant City and County governing departments, and decision makers as they contemplate new plans and public investments affecting the whole community. In instances where other entities or organizations have more control over or impact on a particular issue, the Comp Plan’s goals and policies direct the City and County to coordinate appropriately.

### 1.4 Legal Purpose of the Comp Plan

The Comp Plan is the general plan for Albuquerque and Bernalillo County, providing a course of action for urban conservation and development and for environmental management. Its statutory purpose, in NMSA 1978, Section 3-19-9(A), is “to guide and accomplish a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the City, which will, in accordance with existing, and future needs, best promote health, safety, morals, other, convenience,

prosperity or the general welfare, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development.”

The Comp Plan is prepared in accordance with State law (NMSA 1978, Sections 3-19-1 to -12), which authorizes municipalities to “prepare a general or master plan which may be referred to as the general plan.”<sup>3</sup> Article IX of Albuquerque’s City Charter, adopted in 1971, requires that City officials “in the interest of the public in general shall protect and preserve environmental features such as water, air, and other natural endowments, ensure the proper use and development of land, and promote and maintain an aesthetic and humane urban environment.” The County is also authorized to conduct long-range planning by state statute in NMSA 1978, Section 4-57-1 to -3.

### 1.5 Comprehensive Planning in Albuquerque and Bernalillo County

The first Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan was prepared in 1975 with resident assistance in response to rapid growth after 1960. It included both policies and maps designating open space areas,

This comprehensive plan describes how we can preserve and enhance the special places we value, even as we grow and evolve.

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six “metropolitan” areas (with prescribed housing density ranges), and urban centers. The 1975 Plan’s development strategy was based on four objectives:

1. Emphasize infill development
2. Balance public improvements between proposed new development and existing service area needs
3. Create an open space network
4. Support existing and new diverse neighborhoods

The Albuquerque and Bernalillo County Planning Commissions commenced a revision in 1986 that largely replaced the 1975 plan to address issues and choices

# Comp Plan 101

## WHAT IS THE COMP PLAN?

This Comp Plan is a policy document jointly adopted by the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County. It describes the community's vision for the future of the built and natural environment and provides goals, policies, and implementing actions to achieve that vision. In this way, the Comp Plan shapes the future of Albuquerque and the unincorporated areas of Bernalillo County by guiding decisions about growth, development, and public investments related to land use, transportation, urban design, parks and open space, housing, economic development, community identity, infrastructure, community facilities, and services.

## HOW WILL IT BE USED?

The Comp Plan will be used to analyze zone change requests and development proposals and to shape other planning efforts made by the City and County, including as representatives

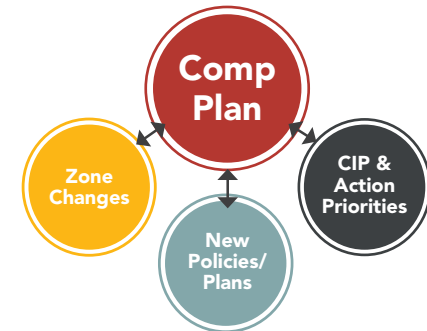
to regional bodies such as MRCOG and the Albuquerque Water Utility Authority (ABCWUA). The Comp Plan includes policies that address many potentially conflicting challenges, issues, and opportunities for development. Staff and decision makers must weigh all applicable policies on a case-by-case basis. The Comp Plan can also guide how the City and County prioritize infrastructure investments, and how they should coordinate with other public agencies and private partners to harness the necessary resources to implement and fulfill the community vision.

## Comprehensive Plans typically include:

- A brief historic, cultural, and geographic context
- A community vision for future growth
- Existing conditions and trends
- Goals and policies grouped
- Actions to implement the vision

## GOALS & POLICIES

The Comp Plan is the main policy document used to guide discretionary decisions about changes to zoning and the adoption of new plans. The Plan relies on coordinated zoning standards and capital investment programs to give “teeth” to the “shoulds” that it sets out. The advantage of policy language is the ability to aspire to outcomes that may not be achievable through individual regulations. Where “should”



is used in this Comp Plan, it is not merely a suggestion but rather the appropriate language to indicate policy. “Shall” indicates regulations and are appropriate in zoning codes and ordinances.

The Comp Plan, along with zoning regulations, will be the primary implementation tool for the Centers & Corridors Vision, illustrated in the Vision Map (**Figures 3-1 and 3-2**).

## HOW & WHEN WILL IT CHANGE?

The Comp Plan guides growth to 2040. It is anticipated that the Comp Plan will be updated every five years to account for changing conditions and minor issues, but it is not expected to undergo a major rewrite for twenty years.



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identified by residents and staff. This version was adopted in 1988 and was amended again in 2002 to establish a “Centers and Corridors” framework for future growth.

In 2016, the Plan was updated to better coordinate land use and transportation, improve the viability of biking and walking options for better mobility and access for all residents and workers, and promote placemaking for economic development and community engagement.

The 2016 update confirms and strengthens the Centers and Corridors framework from 2002, which prioritizes infill and growth in more urban areas and encourages any growth undeveloped areas outside the urban footprint to remain low density or develop as Master Planned communities with Centers and Corridors. Although emphases have shifted, the overarching goals and vision for the region remain the same.

### 1.6 How Does the Comp Plan Relate to Other Plans?

By ordinance, other adopted City and County plans are subordinate to and must be consistent with this Comp Plan. Both entities



Image credit: City of Albuquerque

Residents participating in a visioning exercise that informed the Comp Plan.

will continue using existing Rank 2 Facility Plans for a handful of services and networks, such as electricity, trails and bikeways, and public Open Space. While the Comp Plan remains the overall guiding policy document for both the City and the County, implementation will differ between the two jurisdictions (see **Figure 1-2**).

### 1.6.1 UNINCORPORATED BERNALILLO COUNTY

The County will continue using the current system of ranked plans for specific areas, neighborhoods, and corridors to provide additional guidance beyond the Comp Plan. In the County, Development Areas guide density (for zoning purposes), site development plans, master plans, and other planning documents for specific areas and

developments. The current Bernalillo County Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance will remain in effect following the adoption of the updated Comp Plan.

### 1.6.2 CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE

From the 1970s through 2014, the City adopted almost 100 standalone plans to provide guidance beyond the Comp Plan for smaller geographic areas. These plans included over 1,300 policies that range from very general to narrowly targeted. The system became increasingly difficult to implement and administer, as plan boundaries sometimes overlapped, and policies often conflicted. Many were not coordinated with other City policies and plans, and most were not updated over time.

The 2016 Comp Plan update simplifies this structure by incorporating land use and development-related policies that should be extended citywide or to larger geographic areas from the City's Rank 2 Area Plans and Rank 3 Sector Development Plans (SDPs) into the Comp Plan. Information, goals, and policies have been updated as much as possible and coordinated across topics. This approach is intended to improve consistency and legibility of the City's guiding policies,

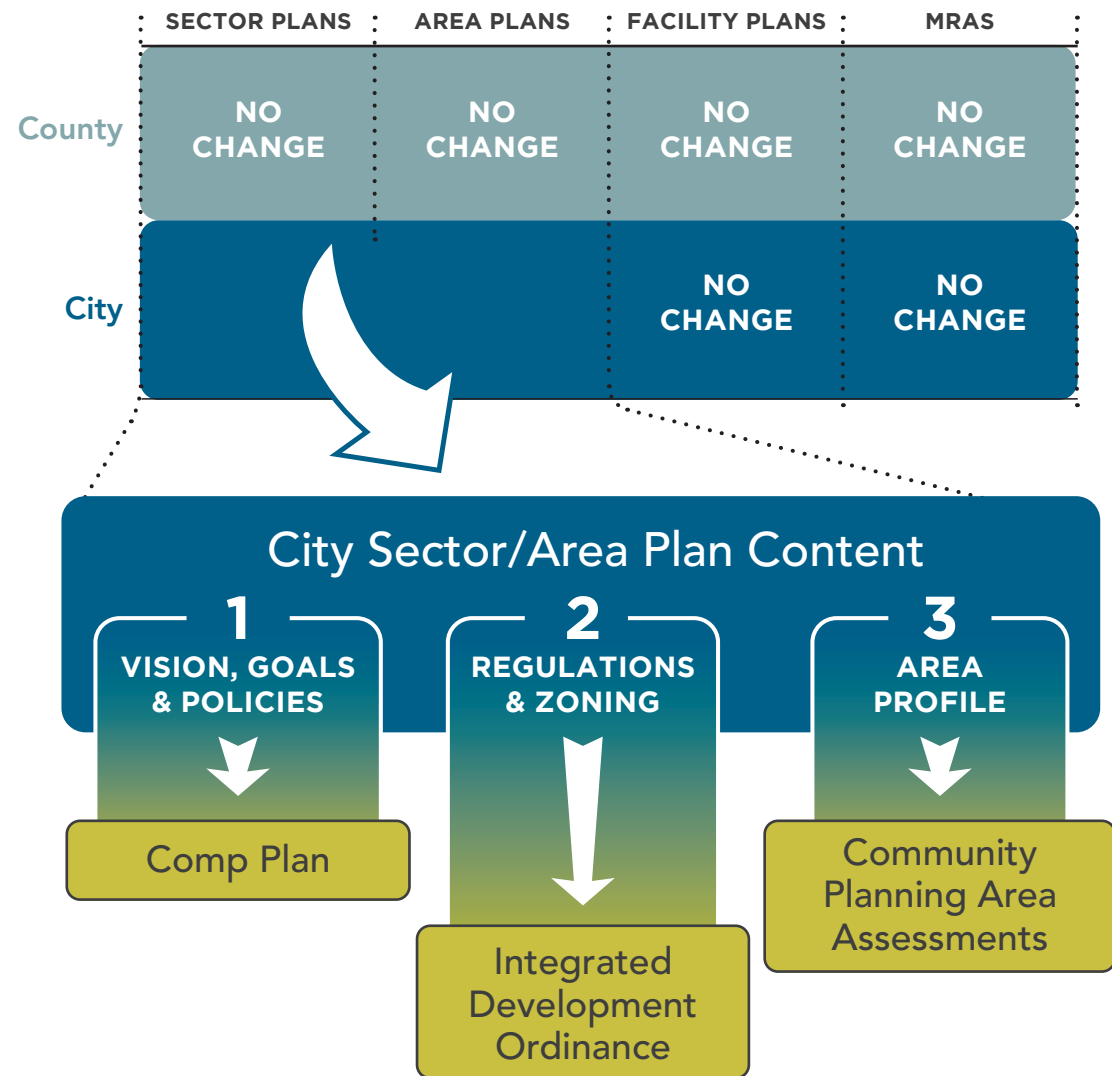


Figure 1-3 How the 2016 Update Affects the Land Use Planning Framework in the City and County

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so that they can be more easily accessed and applied by staff and the public. The City will continue to use Rank 2 Facility Plans and Rank 3 Metropolitan Redevelopment Area Plans as standalone documents.

In the future, the City plans to replace sector planning efforts with a proactive, ongoing five-year cycle of assessments of Community Planning Areas (CPAs) to understand the pressures and needs of neighborhoods and recommend updates to policies in the Comp Plan, regulations in the zoning code, and/or implementation steps for agencies and departments.

### 1.6.3 METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The Comp Plan is coordinated with MRCOG's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The Center and Corridor designations in the Comp Plan go into greater detail to provide guidance for implementation to the City and County as local jurisdictions.

The MTP is updated every four years, so the Comp Plan's goals and policies must be broad and adaptable enough to remain relevant and responsive to the MTP's more frequent update cycle. A five-year cycle for updates to the Comp Plan, coordinated with

the City's CPA assessments, is proposed to ensure that the Comp Plan and the MTP remain in alignment to achieve regional and local goals.

## 1.7 Building the Vision

The Vision described in **Chapter 3** reaffirms many goals from the previous Comp Plan and brings our priorities into sharper focus. Through public workshops, focus groups, and surveys conducted in 2015-2016, community members pointed to goals that are still important and suggested new goals for the future.

The public engagement process inspired thoughtful ideas about challenges we face and opportunities we have to improve our community (see **Appendix B** for more about public engagement). With a better understanding of our shared vision for the community's future, we have updated the Comp Plan goals and policies to coordinate our efforts for each topic in order to move us toward our Centers and Corridors vision.

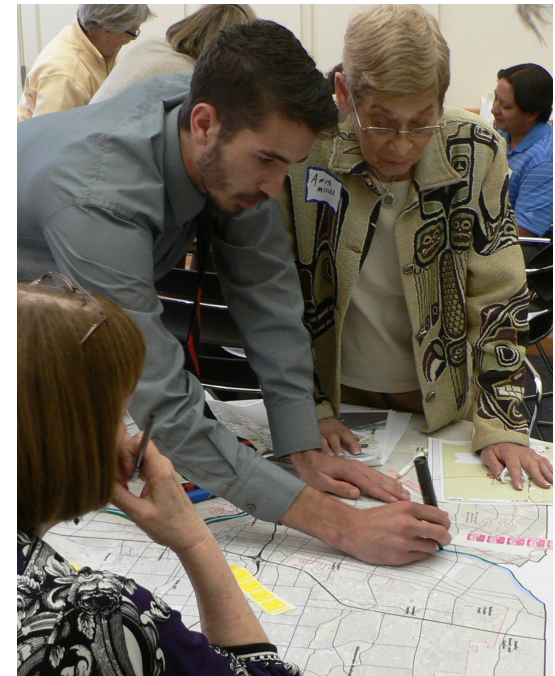


Image credit: City of Albuquerque

*Multiple generations working together to plan for the future of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County.*

## 1.8 Key Updates to the 2016 Comp Plan

### 1.8.1 UPDATED CENTERS & CORRIDORS FRAMEWORK

When the Centers and Corridors vision was first adopted in the Comp Plan in 2001, a lengthy public hearing process in both the City and the County resulted

in a hierarchical framework of Centers, incorporating areas that were recognized as Major, Community, and Special Activity Centers. These designations were based on existing development and future activity areas adopted in separate Area Plans, Master Plans, SDPs, or Corridor Plans. The 2013 Comp Plan update added Centers and Corridors that had subsequently been approved through separate planning efforts, including updates to the West Side Strategic Plan.

The 2016 Comp Plan update adds Centers subsequently approved by the County. It makes slight changes to the category names and terminology describing the different kinds of centers and introduces a new type of Center, *Employment Center*, to prioritize job creation. The change in language is intended to make the categories easier to understand and use, as well as to ensure that key goals are implementable.

For the Corridors, the term, *Multi-Modal* replaces *Enhanced Transit* to better describe corridors where transit and autos share lanes, with bike facilities provided either in protected lanes in the roadway or on parallel streets within the Corridor. *Premium Transit* is a new Corridor type added to reflect routes that have been studied for high-capacity and high-frequency transit service, such as

bus rapid transit, which may ultimately have a dedicated transit lane. **Tables 1-1 and 1-2** outline the general transition from the previous terms to the new ones and provides a high-level description of the changes.

### 1.8.2 CHANGES TO DEVELOPMENT AREAS

The 2016 Comp Plan update replaces the City’s Development Areas from 1974 (Central Urban, Established Urban, Developing Urban, and Semi-Urban) with two new Development Area designations: *Areas of Change*, where change is desired or anticipated, and *Areas of Consistency*, where significant growth is unlikely or undesirable and where any new development or redevelopment will need to be consistent with the established character of the surrounding context (see **Land Use chapter, Section 5.1.2.5** for more information about new City Development Areas).

For the County, areas of anticipated change are designated within Centers and Corridors and in other locations through Area Plans, SDPs, and Corridor Plans. Master Plans adopted within Rural or Reserve Areas in the County will also designate areas that are expected to change, including new Centers and Corridors and areas appropriate for

mixed-use and higher-density development. The Development Area designations within the unincorporated County will remain unchanged.

### 1.8.3 RELATIONSHIP TO REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

As of 2016, the City intends to adopt a new regulatory framework – the Integrated Development Ordinance (IDO) – that includes an updated zoning code, subdivision ordinance, planning ordinance, and associated development standards. Policies from the City’s existing Rank 2 Area Plans and Rank 3 Sector Development and Corridor Plans were assessed to determine their potential benefit to the city as a whole. Appropriate policies have been elevated to the updated Comp Plan to apply citywide or to larger geographic areas, while effective and enforceable zoning and regulations are being consolidated into IDO regulations. Policies for smaller areas of the city will be identified through the City’s CPA assessment process and reflected in the **Community Identity chapter** over time.

For the County, the current zoning regulations, system of special use permits, and sector plans with zoning and/or overlays will remain in place.

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PREVIOUS NAME	NEW NAME	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
Major Activity Center	Downtown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritizes Downtown as its own Center, with the highest level of intensity.</li> </ul>
Community Activity Center	Urban Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes two Urban Centers, with less intensity than Downtown but still serving a more regional market than Activity Centers.</li> </ul>
	Activity Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizes a neighborhood-scale and market size for mixed-use centers throughout the Plan area.</li> </ul>
NEW	Employment Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritizes job creation.</li> <li>• Focuses on industrial, office, and retail opportunities.</li> <li>• Tends to be auto-oriented, with excellent access to the freight network.</li> </ul>
Specialty Activity Center	Deleted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removed designations for lands not under City jurisdiction.</li> </ul>
Rural Village Activity Center	Village Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizes the size of the Center rather than the location (i.e. rural).</li> </ul>

Table 1-1: Centers Framework Changes

PREVIOUS NAME	NEW NAME	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
Express Corridor	Commuter Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More clearly communicates the primary users of this Corridor type.</li> </ul>
Major Transit Corridor	Premium Transit Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritizes key Corridors for the highest level of public investment in high-quality, high-capacity transit service.</li> </ul>
	Major Transit Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritizes high-frequency transit in Corridors consistent with regional transportation plans.</li> <li>• Updates designations consistent with the Mid-Region Council of Governments Metropolitan Transportation Plan.</li> </ul>
Enhanced Transit Corridor	Multi-Modal Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages balancing priorities between transit and vehicle traffic within a shared roadway, with improved pedestrian environment and protected or parallel bike facilities.</li> </ul>
NEW	Main Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates a new designation for streets with neighborhood-scale retail and pedestrian-oriented building design, orientation, and scale.</li> </ul>

Table 1-2: Corridors Framework Changes

### 1.8.4 OTHER CHANGES

- **Added content and organization:** The introduction and context for each topic area (Section I prior to 2016) have moved into a combined chapter with goals and policies (previously Section II).
- **Comp Plan Elements: Community Identity; Urban Design; Parks & Open Space; Heritage Conservation; Infrastructure, Community Facilities & Services; and Resilience & Sustainability chapters** reorganize and expand content from the previous Comp Plan. See **Chapter 3** for a description of the layout of Comp Plan Element chapters.
- **Guiding Principles and Vision Map:** New Guiding Principles, a description of the community Vision, and a Vision Map communicate a clearer picture of what we want for the future.

- **New and revised goals:** Goals for each topic area have been synthesized from the current adopted goals and policies, as well as issues and concerns raised by the public through engagement efforts in 2015 and 2016.
- **New implementation tools:** An updated **Implementation chapter** includes five-year strategic actions, performance measures, and a policy action implementation matrix to guide City and County departments. Performance metrics helps establish baseline data, and ongoing processes are proposed to track and analyze them over time to ensure implementation and guide equitable public investment throughout the community. See the **Implementation chapter** for more about strategic actions and performance metrics.



Image credit: City of Albuquerque



Residents enjoy a variety of outdoor activities.

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### Chapter 1 Endnotes

1. U.S. Census Bureau 2014 estimate
2. Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) Socioeconomic Forecast for 2040
3. Other New Mexico Statutes refer to the term “comprehensive plan” limited to a rational pattern of zoning for the official zone map.