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From: Lisa Padilla <lisapwardchair@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 15, 2023 3:56 PM
To: Lehner, Catalina L.; Salas, Alfredo E.; Bolivar, Silvia A.
Cc: 'liberty.c.bell@icloud.com'; Cristina Rogers; dorothy chavez
Subject: Downtown Albuquerque News aicle re: 2nd and Santa Fe

[EXTERNAL] Forward to phishing@cabq.gov and delete if an email causes any concern.

Here is an article, in addition to the letter sent out a half an hour ago. I hope you find it helpful to learn more about the context in which this support from the BNA comes. Thanks so much for all you.

Mil gracias,

Lisa Padilla

President

Barelas Neighborhood Association

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From: Downtown Albuquerque News <downtownabqnews@gmail.com>
Date: Monday, May 15, 2023 at 4:59 AM
To: lisapwardchair@gmail.com <lisapwardchair@gmail.com>
Subject: As activist group arrives in Barelas, an argument over affordable housing veers far from the usual script



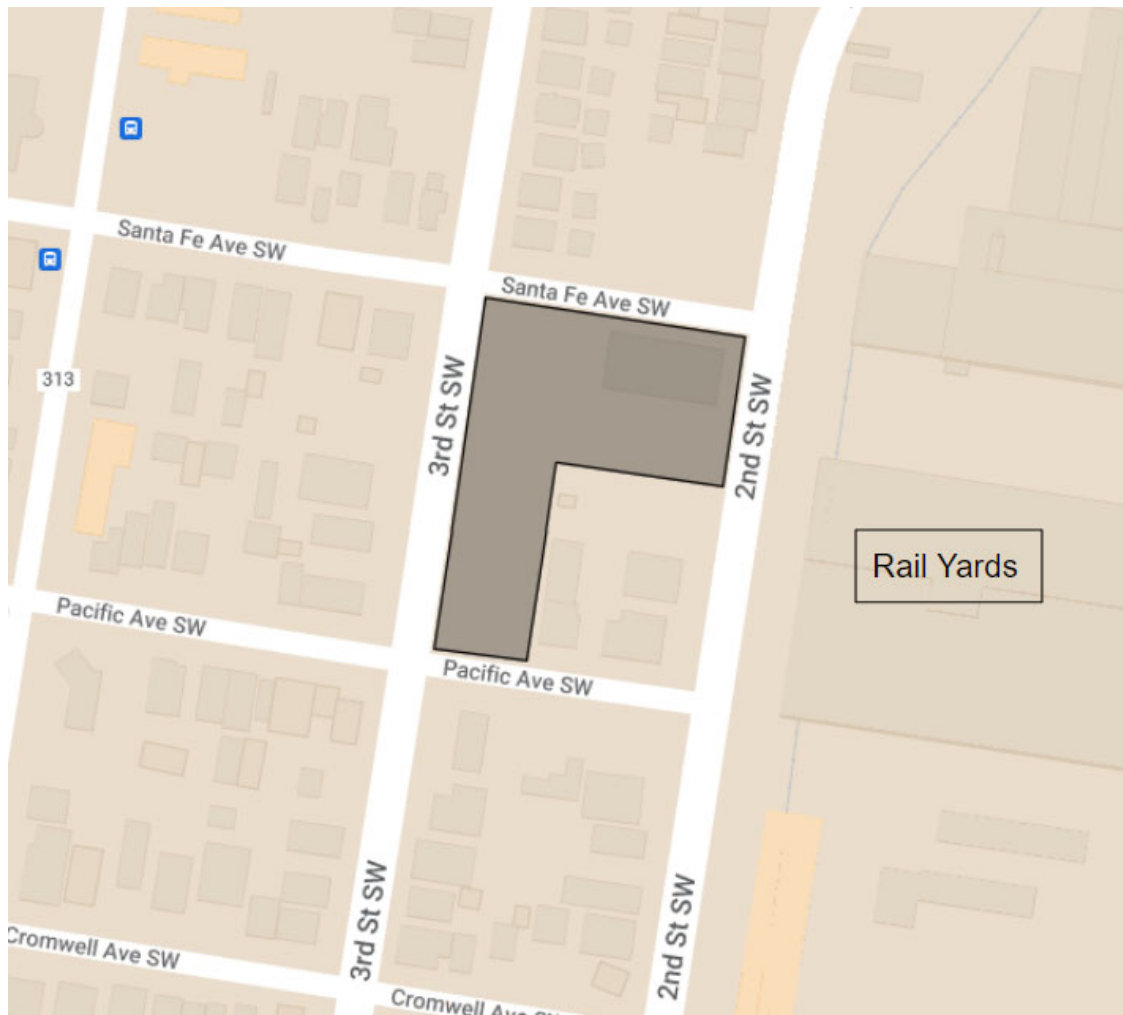
Briefing:

- *As activist group arrives in Barelas, an argument over affordable housing veers far from the usual script*
- *The Hollywood and Rio Grande crosswalk leaves much to be desired and points to larger problems, DAN readers report*

As activist group arrives in Barelas, an argument over affordable housing veers far from the usual script



A group headquartered in the International District called the People's Housing Project has recently become involved in a conflict over a proposed apartment complex at Second and Santa Fe. The group, along with a few residents who live near the proposed project, held a rally last week in opposition.



The property in question is adjacent to the Rail Yards. It was once home to a notorious bar called the A & P.

Conflicts over new apartment complexes typically follow a well-worn pattern: The developer proposes something, neighbors catch wind of it, the neighborhood association gets involved, and before too long, a united front appears in opposition, usually arguing that curbside parking will become scarce, traffic congestion will worsen, and the broader character of the place will be left in ruins. When affordable housing is involved, the opposition can be even greater still.

But this spring in Barelás, that usual pattern is being turned on its head. A developer is proposing to build 60-70 units of affordable housing and ground-floor retail ([DAN, 1/3/23](#)), but far from opposing it, the Barelás Neighborhood Association has given its blessing to the project, having first encouraged him to buy the property 15 years ago.

Three board members who live near the development are nevertheless opposed, which is certainly not unheard of. More unusual is that they have lately joined forces with a citywide group that argues the new housing, [which would generally cap rent to 30 percent of a tenant's income](#) and be offered only to households that bring in significantly less than average, is in fact a harbinger of gentrification. Whatever benefits accrue to the low-income families who would call the complex home, the group reckons, amount to insulting crumbs thrown down by a corrupt capitalist elite.

The story begins in 2008, when the Rail Yards-adjacent property formerly home to the notorious A & P Bar was last for sale. Coming a year after the city had purchased the Rail Yards with dreams of redevelopment, the fate of the smaller but still-prominent property nearby was of great interest to the neighborhood association.

"We wanted a gateway from the neighborhood into the Rail Yards," said Dorothy Chávez, a BNA board member. Even then, the development was envisioned as including some retail on the ground level and housing above, she added.

At the time, the association had connections to and a trusting relationship with Chad Rennaker, who would later go on to redevelop El Vado and more recently has proposed a 315-unit complex on West Central ([DAN, 5/1/23](#)). They asked him to buy it, Chávez said, and he took them up on the invitation.

But just as things moved more slowly than expected at the Rail Yards, likewise nothing much happened on the vacant property for many years. Finally, last December, Rennaker came to a neighborhood meeting with a proposal that was more-or-less in line with the ideas that had been kicked around for 15 years: 60-plus affordable units, several small commercial "micro-retail" spaces, and a taproom. The model is straight out of his usual playbook: He did much the same thing at El Vado Place, the price-controlled apartment complex adjacent to the famous former motor lodge of the same name, and in Sawmill, where among other projects he built a 60-unit affordable complex called [The Artisan](#), which features small ground-level retail shops and Ponderosa Brewing. (That project was in partnership with the Sawmill Community Land Trust.)

Following the December meeting, either Rennaker or representatives of his company, Palindrome, met with residents and neighborhood association board members three other times (January, February, and March) to discuss the finer details of the project. For most of the last few months at least, what controversy there was generally confined itself to those meetings.

But within the last few weeks, the matter has broken out into a more open forum. The three neighborhood association board members who oppose the development - JoAnn Garcia, Onastine Nuñez Jaramillo, and Crystal Garcia - formed a new group called The Residents of Barelás, and last Wednesday, it staged a joint rally against the development with a citywide organization called the [People's Housing Project](#) - itself [a rebooted version of Stop the Stadium](#), a group that fought the 2021 soccer stadium bond initiative.

The People's Housing Project also substantially overlaps with still another group: The [Party for Socialism and Liberation](#). The prominent activist Bex Hampton, [who was caught up in a city ethics board investigation](#) in 2021 for failing to properly register the anti-stadium effort, does organizing work for the party and also assisted with last week's rally, and other organizers work with both groups as well. The party and the People's Housing Project [share office space](#) on San Pedro.

On the housing front, the party advocates for policies that would cap rent at 10 percent of income, ban evictions, and make it ["illegal to generate private profit by renting or selling land."](#)

Last week's rally laid bare some major differences of opinion: "Elite local politicians and associations," People's Housing Project organizer Anna Lee DeSaulniers told reporters and onlookers, have made Barelás "a target for gentrification and racist campaigns of displacement." The project, which is proposed at three stories, would constitute "high-rise buildings for housing profiteers" that would have "catastrophic consequences" for the neighborhood and become "a Trojan horse for gentrification," she continued, adding that "all the housing built here should be dignified, publicly owned, and rent-controlled."

At first blush, the entire controversy may seem like a bit of a paradox, given that it

features an organization advocating for affordable housing fighting with a developer who wants to build 60-70 units of it. But there is a deeper disconnect: Opponents are suspicious of the ground-floor commercial operations and the traffic and parking issues they may present. They are also opposed to having a taproom nearby, though Palindrome has recently amended its zone change application to effectively block its own way toward that goal in the near term while leaving open the possibility of asking for a neighborhood sign-off at a later date.

Fundamentally, however, the project's opponents do not believe that the apartments would actually be affordable, or that such federally-regulated designations would in the end hold the developers to their plans and promises.

"We have learned not to trust that proposed affordable housing will actually be accessible to us," said Crystal Garcia, an organizer with The Residents of Barelas. "What we want to know is, affordable for who?"

In [an information sheet distributed this week](#), Palindrome said that the apartments would be available to households making between 30 and 60 percent of the [area median income](#). Such projects are typically financed through the [Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program](#), with rent prices controlled by a complex formula that takes into account the number of bedrooms in an apartment and which particular income level the unit is targeted for. If a one-bedroom apartment was rented today under Palindrome's proposed arrangement, the company calculates the price at between \$424 and \$849 per month.

Another point of contention is just how long the units would be required to remain affordable. Organizers with both the People's Housing Project and The Residents of Barelas believe the length of time is 15 years - far too short a period, they contend. But assuming Palindrome keeps to its plans, which call for financing through those federal tax credits, [that period would actually be 30 years](#).

For the People's Housing Project, however, anything less than public ownership of a property currently in private hands and a rent control system currently not on the New Mexico law books isn't worthy of consideration.

"It's not good enough," DeSaulniers said. "We're not going to demand any less than

we deserve."

The Barelás Neighborhood Association, meanwhile, remains a supporter of the project. Last week, its board voted 6-3 to write a letter to that effect to the city's Environmental Planning Commission, which will consider [the zone change application](#) allowing commercial retail at [a meeting on Thursday](#).

"The majority don't view this specific project as an example of gentrification, given that it is new affordable rental stock in a neighborhood comprised of over 50 percent renters, with many living in substandard conditions," the board wrote in its letter. It went on to vouch for Palindrome's fact sheet and thanked the firm for "their sensitivity to the neighborhood's concerns ... and for meeting with residents several times in advance of this request."

Under city code, the EPC must consider the application against a series of pre-set criteria elaborated [here](#). The commission's decision can also be appealed to the City Council.

The Hollywood and Rio Grande crosswalk leaves much to be desired and points to larger problems, DAN readers report

Eight alert readers responded to our recent request for feedback on the new crosswalk at Hollywood and Rio Grande, which features push buttons that set off flashing LED lights - in theory putting motorists on notice to stop.

A few took the position that the new arrangement is, on balance, worse than the previous one.

Before the crosswalk, "it was always easy to cross there - just be patient and wait for a gap in traffic in both directions," reports John. "I can still cross the same way, but since the light was put in I've been experimenting with using it. Largely driver compliance has been great! Maybe 80 or 90 percent of the time everyone stops. Yay, drivers respecting non-motorists! But the fact that the other 10 or 20 percent of the time is super dangerous makes the whole thing useless for me as a

pedestrian. It's no comfort to know that I might win a civil suit if I got hit by a driver ignoring the crosswalk and warning signs. It's turned a moderately stressful crossing into a high-stress one for me."

Estimates of exactly what percentage of vehicles stop for the flashing lights vary quite a bit, but none of them are particularly inspiring.

"At best half of the vehicles yield when you activate the new crosswalk lights ... requiring agile but perilous navigation," reports Robert.

"It's very dangerous," Jim added. "Only one or two cars stop. The rest just barrel right through like you're not there. The lights and crosswalk have no meaning to them whatsoever."

Janet, meanwhile, saw a similar scene play out as the passenger in a northbound car: "I saw a cyclist dressed in a bright yellow vest trying to walk through the crosswalk with his bike west to east (toward our side). He was literally surrounded by a sea of cars ... Nobody seemed to be aware or responding, except for the driver he was directly in front of. And he was not able to move out of that lane (next to the center line) because the drivers on the other side of the line (our side) were not stopping ... There isn't even a median/refuge! That truly looks like a good way to kill people!"

Ian, meanwhile, said the new arrangement was a definite improvement, albeit from a low bar: "This exact issue has been on my mind for years ever since moving here, after living in cities with significantly more robust pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructures and driving cultures that do not combine distraction, aggression, and incompetence in the potent mix that we have in Albuquerque. I know that the status quo of driving without paying an iota of attention to pedestrians and cyclists will be the stickiest part of changing our current reality."

Norman suggested a sort of hack that has worked for him and his wife: "We wait until the traffic is lighter - when there have been red lights halting cars at the Central and Mountain interchanges - to minimize the chance that cars won't see the lights (and us). The cars that have been coming have seemed to slow down. The new lights are not a perfect solution, but I do think they can help if you

are a careful pedestrian and do not try to stop a whole slug of oncoming cars."

Others had suggestions for how to fix the situation. Raising the entire crosswalk to effectively make it a very wide speed bump might do the trick, Robert said, as would changing the color of the caution lights to red. Signs spelling out how motorists are supposed to yield to pedestrians might help as well, Ian said.

Russ, meanwhile, suggested a law enforcement crackdown: "The solution is not to eliminate these crossings," he said. "It is to teach drivers the hard way that pedestrians have the right of way when these lights are flashing. Station a policeman or camera and start ticketing! Don't spend the money to put in these crossings with no enforcement. I've seen these crossings work very successfully in other cities where folks are taught to respect them."

Two readers also mentioned that the street trees along Rio Grande make it difficult to see the flashing lights, adding that the situation might be improved by either cutting back the vegetation or otherwise modifying the lights and signs. One, Marilyn, said she had already notified 311 about one particular tree in front of Tammy's Edge Salon.

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