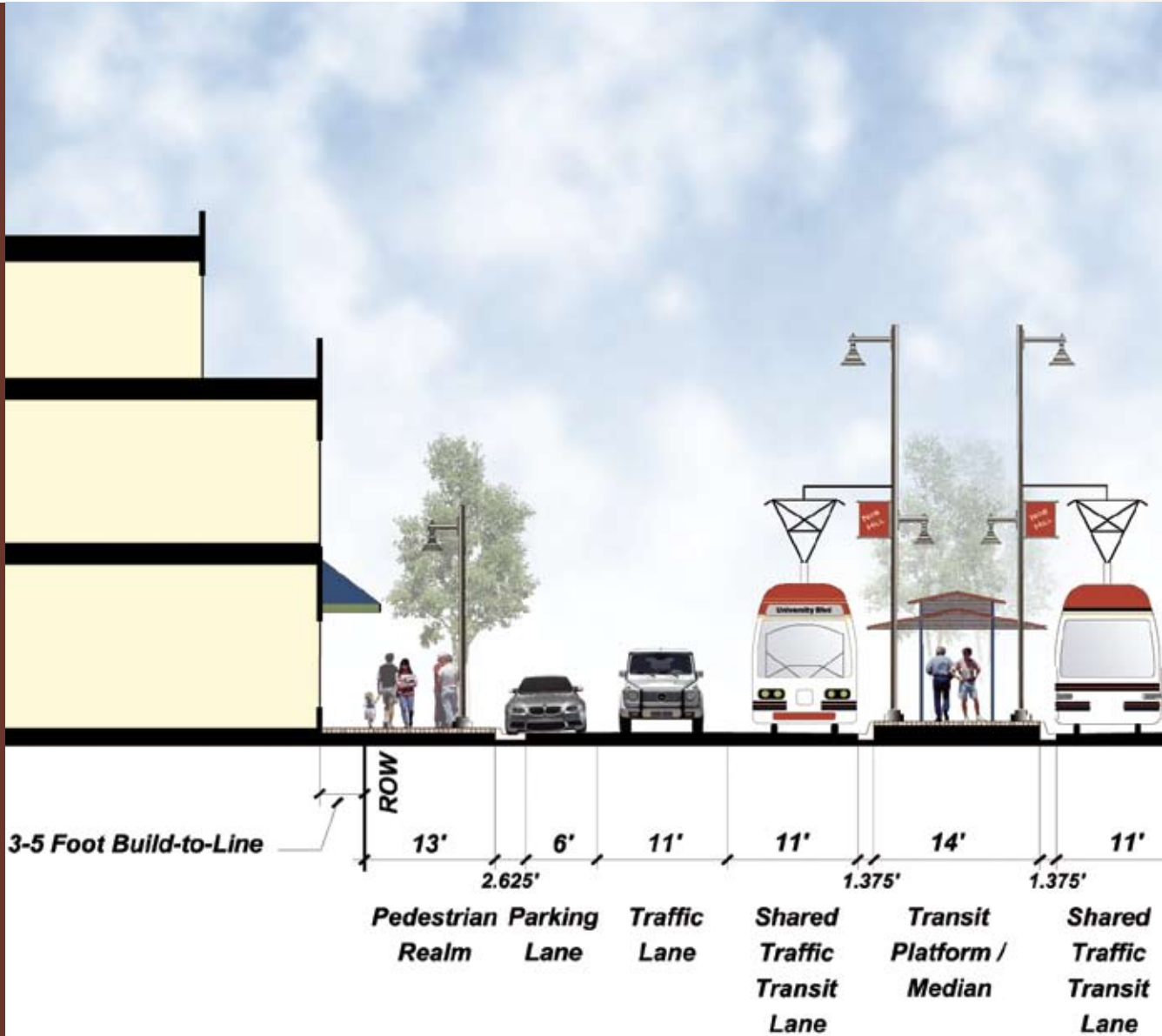


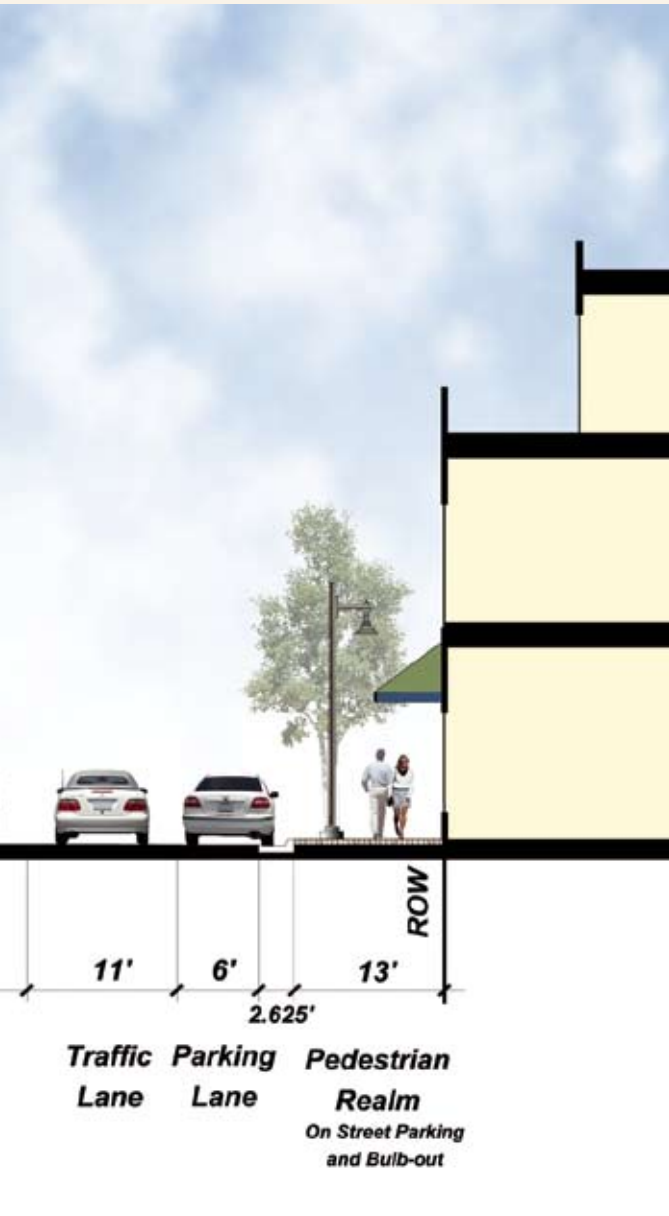
THE ALBUQUERQUE GREAT STREETS PLAN

By Joseph Ehardt, Jr., AICP, CNU

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Albuquerque's Great Streets plan strives to balance the needs of pedestrians, transit and automobiles.



THE CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE PLANNING Department initiated the Great Streets Facility Plan in 2006 to implement the goals and policies of the Albuquerque/Bernalillo Comprehensive Plan and the Planned Growth Strategy. The Comprehensive Plan was developed to respond to a commitment in the City Charter to “promote and maintain an aesthetic and human urban environment.” The Great Streets Facility Plan addresses the Comprehensive Plan’s activity centers and corridors policies in detail, demonstrating how to make city streets safe and attractive social places and enhance their compatibility for transit, walkers and bikers.

What is a Great Street?

Character, quality, historical and current importance to the community, as well as symbolic, social, ceremonial and political significance—these are some of the characteristics that define great streets. According to Allan Jacobs, author of “Great Streets,” and former City of San Francisco planning director, “First and foremost, a great street should help make community; should facilitate people acting and interacting to achieve in concert what they might not achieve alone.”

A great street is memorable as a symbolic or ceremonial place. It is a venue for events, parades, fairs and other civic events, providing social spaces such as plazas, parks, trees, benches and public art that encourage interaction. A great street also supports economic development by being a place of commerce. It should feel safe because generally the greater the amount of activity within a public environment such as a street, the more safe it is. Key design elements such as benches, trees and excellent lighting contribute to the comfort of the street environment and make it a desirable place to be—like an outdoor room.

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Participation is encouraged and opportunities to participate are broad, ranging from athletic events, games, festivals and musical performances to more passive activities such as window-shopping, strolling or people-watching.

Finally, a great street should function well for the walker, the shopper, the transit rider, the young and the old. It is the best the community has to offer—a showplace that invokes a sense of community pride.

Benefits of Great Streets

Developing great streets helps strengthen the symbolic/ceremonial, social, commercial and outdoor spatial qualities and significance of city streets. Albuquerque's Great Streets Facility Plan celebrates unique and notable characteristics of the city and helps make its streets and neighborhoods more vibrant for residents and visitors. In doing so, it contributes to the economic vitality of commercial centers and generates revenue for the city.

However, current street design standards in Albuquerque are not compatible with the Comprehensive Plan's policies regarding walkability, aesthetics and the creation of mixed-use, transit-friendly street environments. Furthermore, there were no mechanisms in place to ensure implementation of these goals into effective and beautiful urban streets. The hope is that the Great Streets Plan will expand transportation choices and spark development of the sort of walkable, transit-friendly corridors and activity centers the city is looking for.

“It is the best the community has to offer—a showplace...”

Scope of Great Streets Facility Plan

The Great Streets Facility Plan was developed by the City of Albuquerque Planning Department with the assistance of HDR and incorporating considerable public input. The plan addresses the



defining qualities of great streets and includes principles, physical realms, design standards and guidelines, prototype designs, and actions needed for implementation. The plan recommends both retrofitting existing streets and building new streets. It recognizes, however, that some existing street segments may have certain constraints in providing ideal sidewalk widths due to limited right-of-way (ROW). The ROW of new streets, on the other hand, should be able to accommodate the prototype design concepts without compromise.

The plan defines a great street as having both transportation (moving people and goods) and



Albuquerque's Great Streets Facility Plan celebrates unique and notable characteristics of the city and helps make its streets and neighborhoods more vibrant.

community functions such as social, commerce, symbolic/ceremonial and outdoor room. The plan then includes principles, standards and guidelines, prototype design concepts, and implementation steps for four street types found within the city: major transit corridors, enhanced transit corridors, arterials and collector streets.

Principles of Great Streets

Great streets are characterized by basic principles, which must be reflected in the design and construction. The principles draw from generally accepted best urban design practices, community values and the goals and objectives of the

Comprehensive Plan. The Great Streets Facilities Plan identifies six basic principles:

- Balanced Activities
- Social Interaction
- Pride of Place
- Sense of Safety
- Visually Attractive
- Responsive to Local Climate

Balanced Activities—Albuquerque's Great Streets plan strives to balance the needs of pedestrians, transit and automobiles. No single mode should dominate to the detriment of any of the others. In some cases, a great street may emphasize one mode

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more than others, but all modes must be addressed. For example, a great street may be designed around the needs of the pedestrian and transit while still accommodating the automobile.

Social Interaction—Great streets allow for social interaction between people by providing spaces for various formal and informal activities, including walking, talking, sitting and passive activities such as people-watching.

Pride of Place—Great streets create a sense of place—a unique character and vitality for the area—and invoke pride in the community. They can become a focal point of the community and through their intrinsic and inherent qualities, attract visitors and tourists and related activities. They create spaces and activities that become focal points and destinations for the surrounding area, the city as a whole, and even beyond.

Sense of Safety—Great streets should provide a safe environment in terms of both vehicular movement and the threat of crime. Pedestrian activity is a critical element of a great street, and people will not walk in an environment in which they do not feel secure. A key component of personal security is the sense that one is physically protected from moving vehicles. This can be achieved through the design of the street, the placement of on-street parking and the inclusion of physical elements such as bollards, street trees and street furniture. Personal safety is also an important component of a great street, and the key element for creating a sense of safety is the presence of other people. “Eyes on the street” is an approach based on the idea that the more people available to look at and watch the street, the safer it will be. Overall, a sense of safety along a great street derives from a combination of physical design and the provision of activities and uses that create visual interest and draw people to the street.

Visually Attractive—Great streets are visually attractive. The design of all elements, including sidewalks, plazas, lighting, landscaping, paving materials and street furniture (benches, trees,

trash receptacles), should be cohesive, attractive and contribute to the vitality and safety of the environment. They should be sustainable in that they are long-lasting and do not require substantial maintenance over time. In addition to the elements associated with the street itself, the design of adjacent buildings plays a key role in enhancing the appearance of the street. First and foremost, buildings must be active with people entering and exiting them regularly. Ideally, buildings include a large amount of clear glass so that pedestrians can see into them and people in the buildings can see out into the street. Also, the architecture of building façades needs to provide interest and a visual unity to the street environment.

Responsive to Local Climate—All streets, and especially great streets, need to be designed appropriately based on the local climate. Depending on the circumstances, this may include providing shade, wind, rain and snow protection. Use of climatically appropriate landscaping and street trees enhances the overall unity of the design as does the use of materials that are indigenous to the general region, i.e., stone, brick, wood, etc.

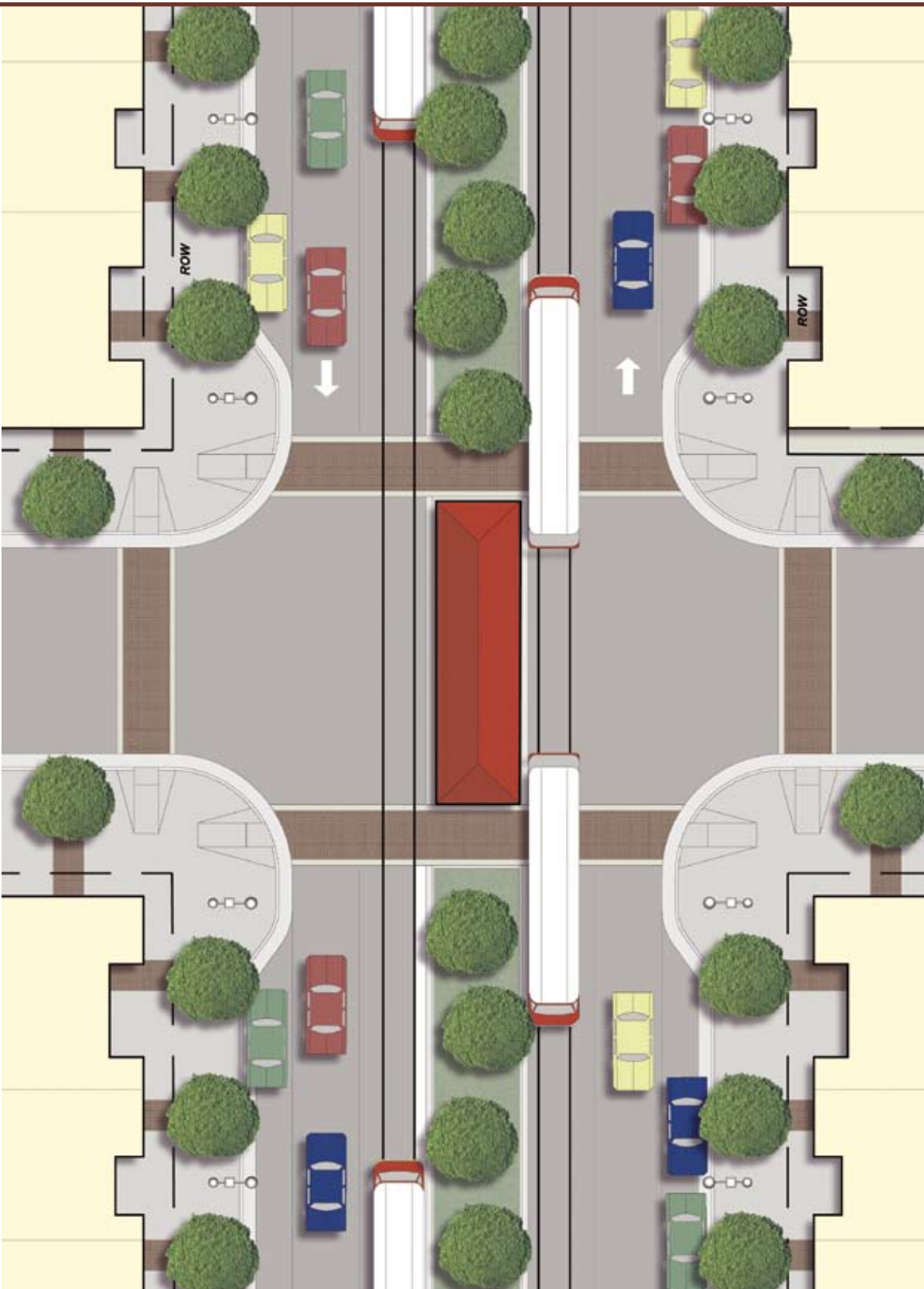
Design Standards and Guidelines

Elements of great streets design concepts include wider sidewalks shaded by trees or awnings. Landscape buffers and on-street parking separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic. Pedestrian lighting provides both an aesthetic value and additional safety. Public art and banners further enhance the aesthetic value of the environment. Way-finding signage is used to identify historic, cultural, civic and other buildings, and textured/patterned roadway pavement marks key points along the way, including the beginning and end of a great street. Finally, transit stops make great streets more accessible.

Recommendations for Albuquerque’s Great Streets Facility Plan are formulated around three physical realms:

- Roadway Realm
- Pedestrian Realm
- Private Realm

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Great streets design uses landscape buffers and on-street parking to separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic.

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The Roadway Realm—The space between the curbs on either side of the street, including traffic lanes, bicycle lanes, on-street parking, transit lanes and medians is part of the roadway realm. Albuquerque’s plan draws a balance between long-held traffic engineering practices and the current interest in creating context sensitive solutions. This is reflected in the design standards and guidelines related to vehicular circulation, including turning radiuses, lane widths and traffic calming.

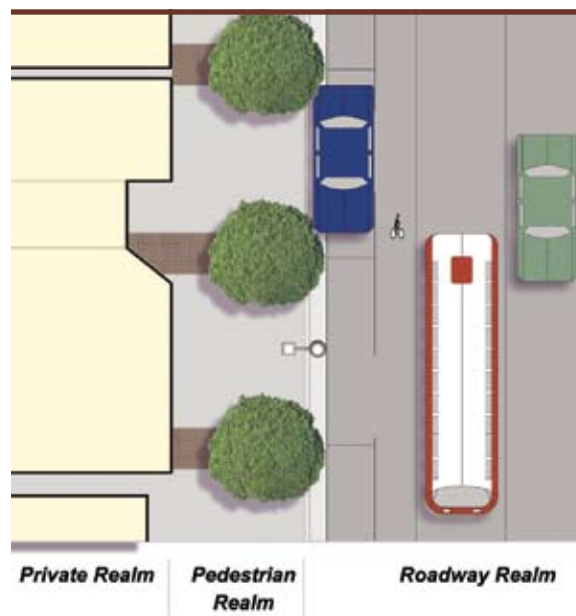
The Pedestrian Realm—This term defines the space between the curb and the ROW boundary or property line. It includes the edge zone, the landscaping/street furniture zone (lighting, signage, benches, trash receptacles, etc.) and the walking zone.

The Private Realm—This physical realm comprises all of the private property outside of the ROW. This includes land use, building site locations, the building frontage zone, height and façade articulation and off-street parking. The Great Streets Facility Plan recognizes the contribution of adjacent buildings and land use to the character and overall quality of a street. Although the plan does not prescribe land use, it recognizes and suggests certain land uses that attract pedestrian patrons, such as retail, restaurants and entertainment venues. The plan also recognizes the importance of elements such as building placement and frontage and provides suggestions for addressing these in the development or redevelopment of a great street.

Prototype Designs

The prototype designs, design standards and guidelines in the Great Streets Facility Plan address the four types of streets defined earlier in the article. The proposed design for each street reflects its character and function and the important role it plays in city life.

Multiple prototype designs were prepared to accommodate varying ROW conditions. The Planning Commission is in the process of reviewing and commenting on the plan and should be ready to send it to the Albuquerque City Council for a vote in fall 2008. ◀



Recommendations for Albuquerque’s Great Streets Facility plan are formulated around three realms: private, pedestrian and roadway.