

Belen Rail Runner Station

INFRASTRUCTURE & DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

23 September 2009



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 23, 2009 the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) in conjunction with the City of Belen conducted a workshop to coordinate infrastructure and development project design efforts around the City of Belen Rail Runner station. Workshop participants included:

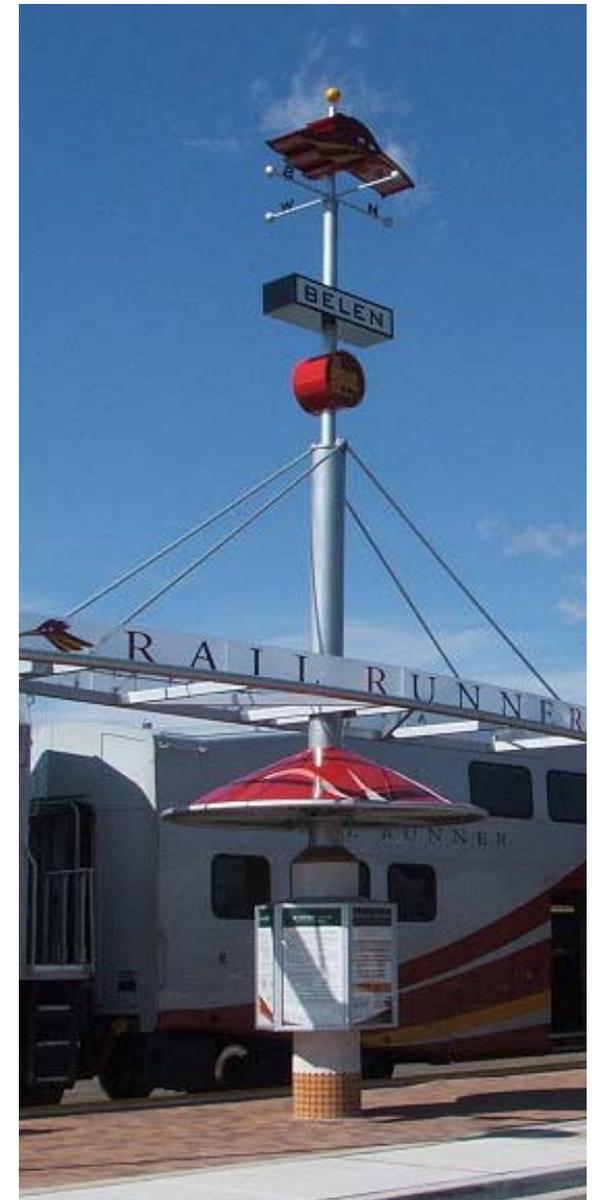
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The workshop was a cooperative effort to prioritize key projects for further design from a list of potential projects identified from the *Belen Station Area Planning Study (Study)*. Eight key projects were identified by the participating stakeholders at the workshop. They are:

1. Landing Area South of Pedestrian Bridge
2. 1st Street Reconfiguration
3. Harvey House Plaza
4. 2nd Street Plaza
5. Becker Avenue between 3rd and 1st Streets
6. Arrival Park
7. Commercial Redevelopment East of Station
8. Reinken Avenue Reconfiguration

As funding becomes available to the City, each of these projects will be ready for more detailed design and implementation. Using the project information detailed in this document, the City of Belen has projects ready to move to the next phase of implementation.



Belen Rail Runner Station

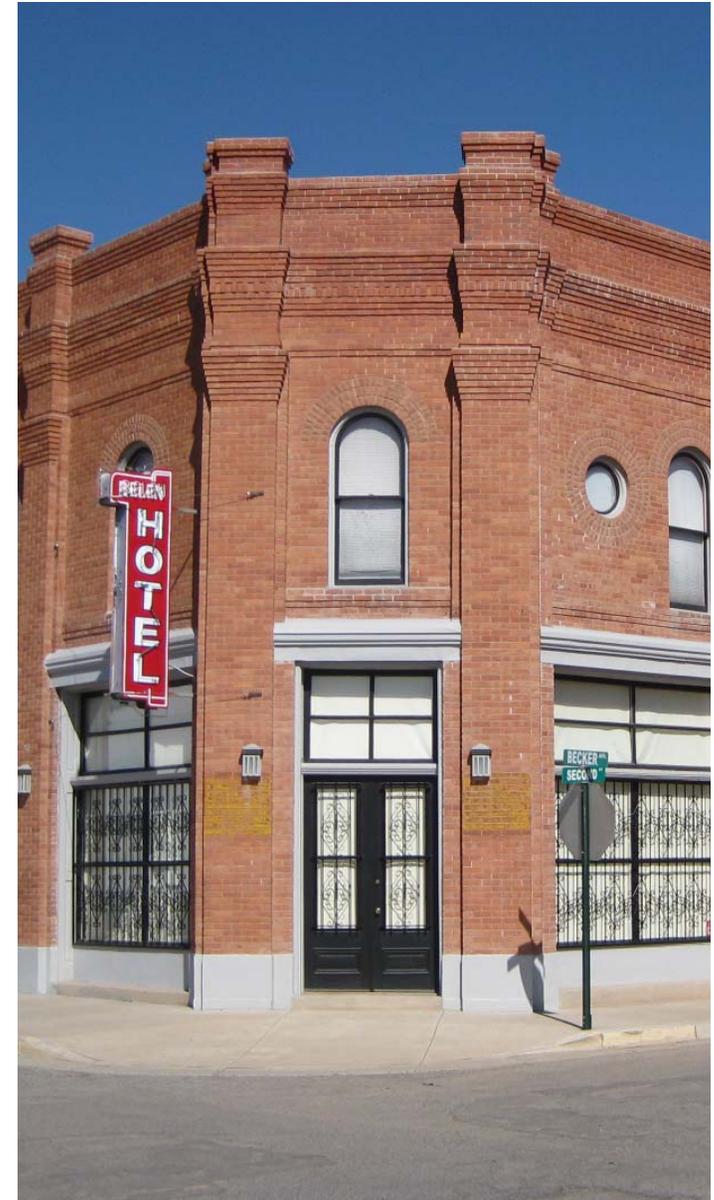
STATION AREA PLANNING STUDY OVERVIEW

The New Mexico Rail Runner links the City of Belen to Albuquerque, Bernalillo, and Santa Fe. The Belen Rail Runner Station is the southern terminus. A station area planning effort for the Belen Rail Runner Station took place during a six month period between June 2008 and December 2008. The result of the planning process was the *Belen Station Area Planning Study (Study)*, which was accepted in 2009. The Study established the framework to encourage redevelopment and improve transportation access for all modes of travel near the station area.

The *Study* was the first step in the community planning and design process for the Belen station area. The *Study* identified issues and opportunities and explored ideas for land use and development, circulation, public spaces, and key projects within the station area.



The Doodle Bug



The Historic Belen Hotel

WORKSHOP RATIONALE

Almost immediately after the acceptance of the *Study*, design work began on a pedestrian bridge that will cross the Reinken Avenue overpass. The Reinken Avenue overpass is a major barrier to connectivity between the Belen Rail Runner Station and downtown Belen. The bridge is currently in the design phase and construction is expected to begin in 2010.

The Belen Rail Runner Station Area Infrastructure & Development Workshop (Workshop) was initiated to continue the implementation of the *Study* by prioritizing and starting conceptual design of other projects recommended in the *Study*. The City of Belen is beginning to move beyond the planning phase for the Station and implement projects. The Workshop identified a list of projects that would be ready for detailed design and implementation when funding becomes available.

The goals of the workshop included:

- Create a list of key projects and initiate the design process.
- Understand project constraints and benefits.
- Prioritize projects that strengthen the sense of place in Belen.
- Use urban design to create visual cues that enhance pedestrian wayfinding.
- Prioritize transportation projects that connect the station area to the “Heart of Belen”.
- Ensure that projects on Becker Avenue between 1st and 3rd Streets do not impact future movie filming opportunities.
- Use transportation investment to encourage redevelopment east of the station.

The workshop was structured so that stakeholders could participate all day or drop in to provide input and review workshop progress. Using the project lists from the *Study* as a starting point, workshop participants discussed which projects would best achieve the goals listed above. When the list was narrowed down, concepts were created and presented.



Workshop Collaboration

SELECTED STATION AREA PROJECTS

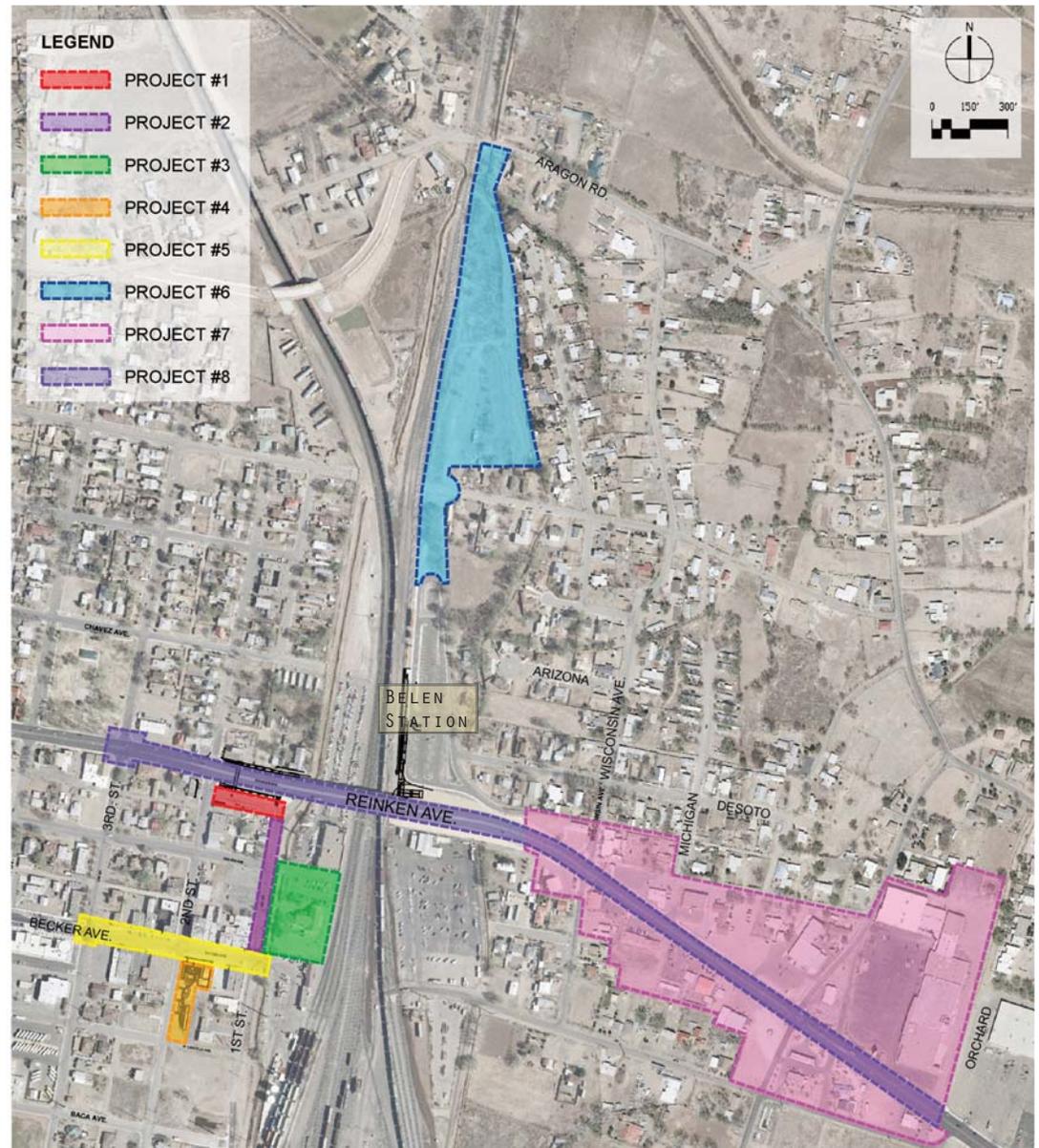
Through the project discussions and strategic input from workshop participants, six projects were selected for further study and preliminary design. These six projects worked towards the goals of creating strong connection between the station and Becker Avenue, enhancing wayfinding features along that connection, and strengthening the sense of place and arrival.

1. Landing Area South of Pedestrian Bridge
2. 1st Street Reconfiguration
3. Harvey House Plaza
4. 2nd Street Plaza
5. Becker Avenue between 3rd and 1st Streets
6. Arrival Park

After the workshop, conversations about station area projects between MRCOG and the project team continued. This led to the inclusion of two additional projects to the workshop document. These projects were added to maximize infrastructure investment to encourage redevelopment east of the station. The two additional projects are:

7. Commercial Redevelopment East of Station
8. Reinken Avenue Reconfiguration

The 8 selected projects are described in the following pages.



Map of Station Area Selected Projects

Project 1 – Landing Area South of Pedestrian Bridge

The landing area south of the pedestrian bridge provides an excellent opportunity to enhance the sense of place in Belen. This area will greet everyone using the pedestrian bridge over the Reinken Avenue overpass. It will provide the connection to both 1st and 2nd Streets, which lead to downtown Belen.

The preliminary design of this area creates a “gateway” to the station with landscaping and decorative paving/crosswalk materials while facilitating safe, convenient, and accessible multimodal accommodation.

Project features include:

- Construct a designated drop-off area/kiss-and-ride.
- Stripe angled parking that provides longer term parking.
- Convert the street to one-way access from 1st Street to 2nd Street.
- Construct way finding features such as distinct crossing material, signage, and landscaping that help create a sense of arrival and place.
- Construct a six foot sidewalk on the north side of the street with decorative paving to provide safe and accessible pedestrian connectivity.



Landing Area Existing Condition



Conceptual Site Plan for the Landing Area



Perspective Looking East at the Drop-off and Landing Area

Project 2 – 1st Street Reconfiguration

1st Street does not currently have a sidewalk along the east side of the street. Additionally, there are very few wayfinding features to lead people to the Harvey House, “Heart of Belen”, or other Belen landmarks.

To enhance the connection along 1st Street, three options were discussed during the workshop. Options discussed included a conversion of 1st Street to a one-way street with angled parking added on the east side of the street, maintaining two-way travel and adding parallel parking to the east side of the street, formalizing the acequia trail, and adding sidewalks to the east side of the street.

Based on stakeholder input during the workshop, one option was selected for further consideration. The selected option is detailed on page 9. It maintains the existing two-way travel configuration on 1st Street and adds parallel parking as well as a sidewalk on the east side of the street. The addition of sidewalks will not preclude the potential to formalize the connection to the station via the acequia trail. This option will likely require moving the curb and gutter on the east side of the street to provide adequate space for two travel lanes and on-street parking.

Project features include:

- Add on-street parallel parking on the east side of 1st Avenue.
- Add a sidewalk on the east side of 1st Avenue.
- Install pedestrian crosswalks using distinct materials at Dalies Avenue, the access to the Harvey House, Becker Avenue, and across access roads on the east side of 1st Street.
- Install pedestrian scale lighting and wayfinding features.
- Evaluate the feasibility of improving the acequia trail with the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District

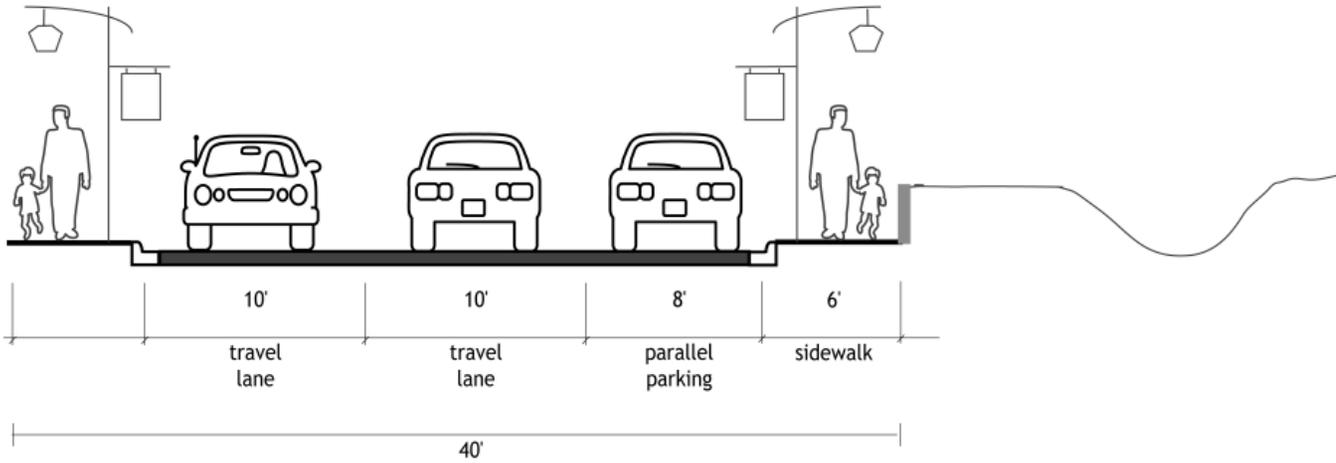


1st Street Existing Condition Looking North



Existing Informal Acequia Trail Along 1st Street

1st Street



Ideas for a Formalized Acequia Trail

1st Street Concept

Project 3 – Harvey House Plaza

The historic Harvey House is located on the east side of 1st Street just north of Becker Avenue. Formerly part of a group of restaurants built by Fred Harvey to serve railroad travelers in the early 1900s, the historic Harvey House is now a railroad museum. The museum, home to a collection of historic artifacts and documents, is open to the public. However, from 1st Street it is difficult to see the Harvey House. During the workshop, participants talked about increasing visibility and connectivity to the Harvey House.

One of the barriers to connectivity to the Harvey House is the BNSF access at the terminus of Becker Avenue. This limits the ability to create a plaza space and landmark that could help draw attention to the Harvey House. Additionally, this access draws attention to the BNSF facility. Relocating the BNSF access to the south would allow the city to create a vertical landmark at the terminus of Becker Avenue.

An additional barrier to the Harvey House is the surface parking lot to the south. Historic photos of the Harvey Houses show a park area to the south of the building. Project 2 adds parking to 1st Street. As such, this park could be restored without a net parking loss near the Harvey House. This park would create a place for people to sit and have lunch or watch the trains come and go.

Along with the restoration of the park, the vehicle and pedestrian access to the Harvey House can be enhanced by creating a formalized drop-off area as well as access for people walking down 1st Street.

Project features include:

- Relocate the BNSF access south of Becker Avenue.
- Restore the park south of the Harvey House.
- Create a formalized drop-off area in front of the Harvey House.
- Enhance pedestrian access from 1st Street.



Historic Image of the Harvey House



The Harvey House Today



WATER TOWER



METAL STRUCTURE



BRICK TOWER



Harvey House Plaza Preliminary Design

Potential Vertical Elements for Becker & 1st

Project 4 – 2nd Street Plaza

The vacant property on the southeast corner of Becker Avenue and 2nd Street provides an opportunity to continue strengthening Belen’s civic spaces as well as providing unique wayfinding features. Additionally, Doodle Bug Park is located at Castillo Avenue and 2nd Street.

By incorporating art and paths, the 2nd Street Plaza ties together existing land uses and creates a place for Belen visitors and residents to enjoy.

Project features include:

- Construct a structure at the corner of Becker Avenue and 2nd Street that mirrors the two historic brick buildings on the northeast and northwest corners to create a visual landmark.
- Construct flexible areas for wall mounted art or sculptures throughout the plaza.
- Design and plant new landscaping that reinforces the style implemented at the pedestrian bridge landing, along 1st Street, and at the Harvey House.



Views of 2nd Street Plaza



View of 2nd Street Plaza Looking North

Project 5 – Becker Avenue between 1st Street and 3rd Street

Becker Avenue is the central focus of the “Heart of Belen” project and has been reconfigured between Main Street and 3rd Street as directed in the Becker Avenue Zone Guidelines. The reconfiguration included narrowing the street, adding angled parking, landscaping, and distinctive street sign structures along the corridor.

The City will continue the reconfiguration of Becker Avenue between 3rd Street and 1st Street to provide a cohesive corridor anchored by Main Street on the west and 1st Street and the Harvey House Plaza on the east. The one exception to continuing the street reconfiguration is the street sign structures. These structures are not recommended east of 3rd Street. Several movies have been filmed in this section of Becker Avenue and any corridor improvements should not preclude future filming opportunities.

Project features include:

- Implement street reconfiguration according to Becker Avenue Zone Guidelines.
- Use angled parking and bulbouts to narrow the street.
- Install pedestrian crosswalks using distinct paving materials.
- Change street sign structures to limit impact to future movie filming opportunities.



**BECKER AVE.
LOOKING EAST**



Street Sign Structure on Becker

Summary of Projects 1-5

Projects 1-5 described on the previous pages were selected to increase connectivity between the station and the “Heart of Belen” and integrate the station into downtown. Each individual project is a step toward creating the vision laid out in the Study.

As described above and shown in the graphic to the right, these projects come together to anchor the east side of the “Heart of Belen” and establish a strong connection between the station and newly improved sections of Becker Avenue. The pedestrian bridge landing area welcomes people walking south from the station into Belen. The 1st Street improvements provide a comfortable waling connection to the enhanced Harvey House, Becker Street, and the new 2nd Street Plaza.



Overview of Projects South of Reinken

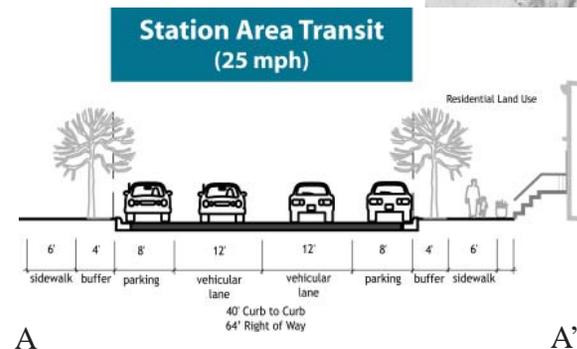
Project 6 – Arrival Park

The creation of an Arrival Park north of the station platform can create identity and public spaces for train riders coming into Belen. It can enhance the area adjacent to the station and provide open space for future multi-family development in the area. Additionally, a new roadway connection to the north will improve connectivity to the station. The main features of the Arrival Park are shown in the preliminary plan to the right.

The *Study* recommends that a new Station Area Transit roadway connection be provided north of the station. This connection creates a new access point for vehicle travel to the station as well as a potential connection for transit. The cross section shown below would provide on-street parking, lanes that can be used by buses, and sidewalks separated from the street by landscaped buffer area. Sharrow ground markings would be provided for bicyclists.

Project features include:

- Construct a new roadway from the Rail Runner Station to Aragon Road.
- Create an acequia trail on the east side of the Park.
- Encourage development that has front doors oriented to the street.
- Develop a master planned, multi-family neighborhood to ensure:
 - Efficient utility placement
 - Safe circulation and sufficient parking
 - Landscaping and drainage
 - Adequate buffering from the rail yards
 - Appropriate building placement/orientation
- Housing typologies could include:
 - Row Houses & Townhomes
 - Terraced Apartments
 - Courtyard Apartments





View of Arrival Park Looking South

Project 7 – Commercial Redevelopment East of Station

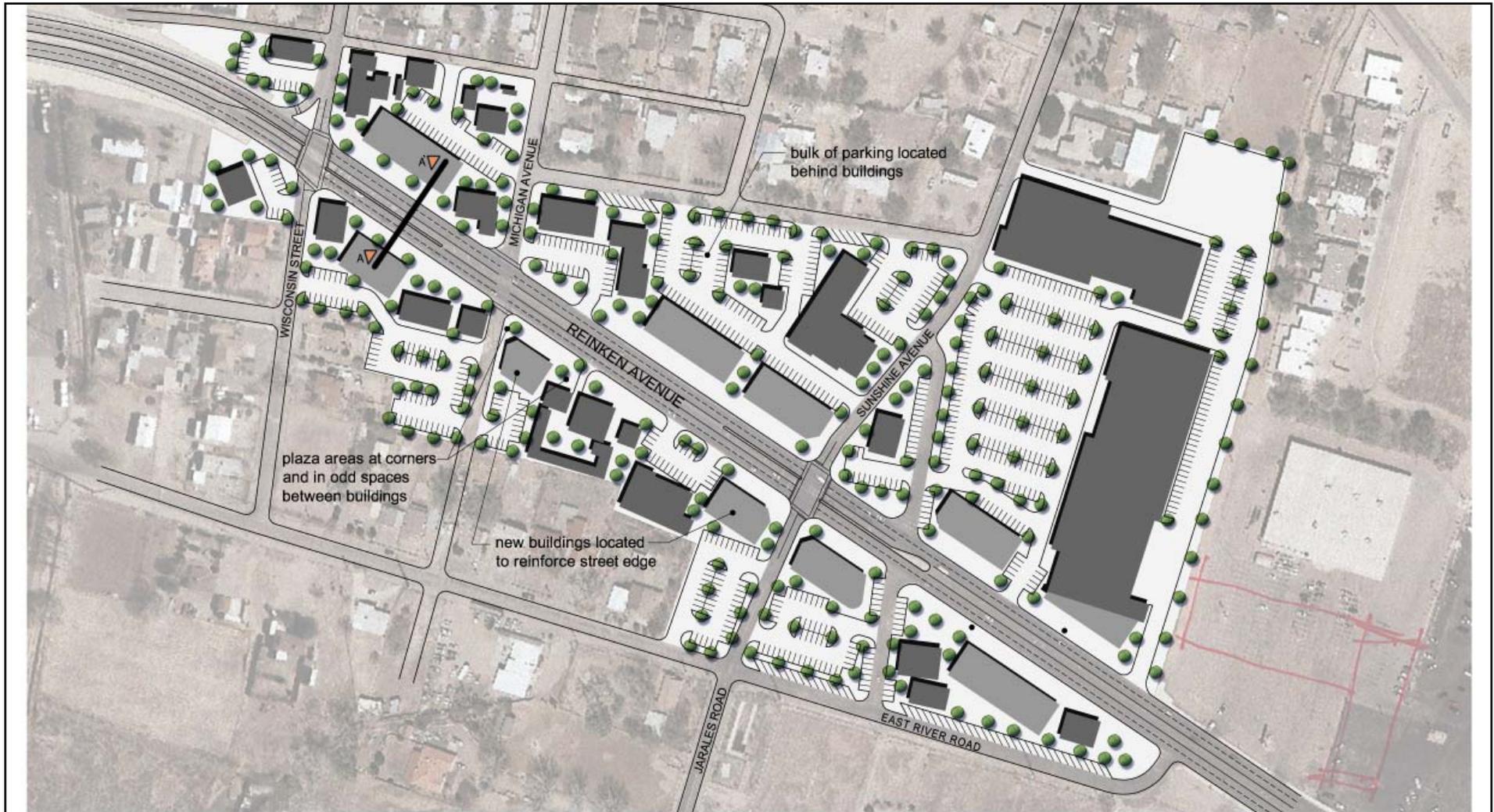
The Rail Runner provides a new mode of access that connects Belen to the Region. It allows Belen and Valencia County residents, particularly the elderly, handicapped, and youth, the opportunity to travel without having to rely on automobiles. Properties along Reinken Avenue east of the station can leverage the proximity to the Rail Runner station to redevelop compact mixed-use neighborhoods for all incomes. Significant portions of the area, generally from Sunshine Avenue on the west to Orchard Avenue on the east along Reinken Avenue, are within walking distance of the station and have the potential to be redeveloped into a more pedestrian-oriented environment that could attract new businesses and spur economic development.

The *Study* proposes new commercial mixed-use redevelopment along Reinken Avenue. While the *Study* recommends new housing and office as part of the mixed-uses along Reinken Avenue, this project also recognizes the opportunity to locate public and health-related uses to take advantage of the proximity to the Rail Runner Station. There is no one vacant site large enough to accommodate the proposed Valencia County “health commons” but there are several sites large enough to develop clinics and a stand-alone urgent care center. The area provides centralized access for a large portion of the County and the Rail Runner makes it even more accessible.

This project proposes a combination of reconfiguring Reinken Avenue and redeveloping existing commercial lots on either side of the street. Reinken Avenue would still function as a primary east-west connection but the character of the street near the Rail Runner Station would change; bike lanes and wider sidewalks would help make the area more amenable to pedestrians and cyclists. These streetscape improvements to Reinken Avenue would be coupled with a redevelopment strategy to attract new uses and businesses to the underutilized commercial area.

Project features include:

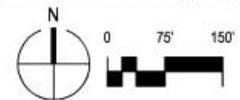
- A more diversified mix of land uses, particularly civic and health-related functions such clinics in the vacant shopping centers and parking areas. While there is not sufficient space for a large hospital complex, there is ample space for clinics and public health services that could be accessed via the Rail Runner.
- Site new buildings to front onto Reinken Avenue, helping to create a more cohesive district and encourage more pedestrian activity on the street. Incorporate standards for landscaping, off-street parking, signage, and lighting.
- Develop plazas and public spaces at the street corners and in “leftover” spaces between buildings.



**Conceptual Re-Development Plan
East Reinken Avenue Commercial District**

Belen, New Mexico 10/21/2009

- existing buildings
- proposed buildings



Dekker/Perich/Sabatini

Project 8 – Reinken Avenue Reconfiguration

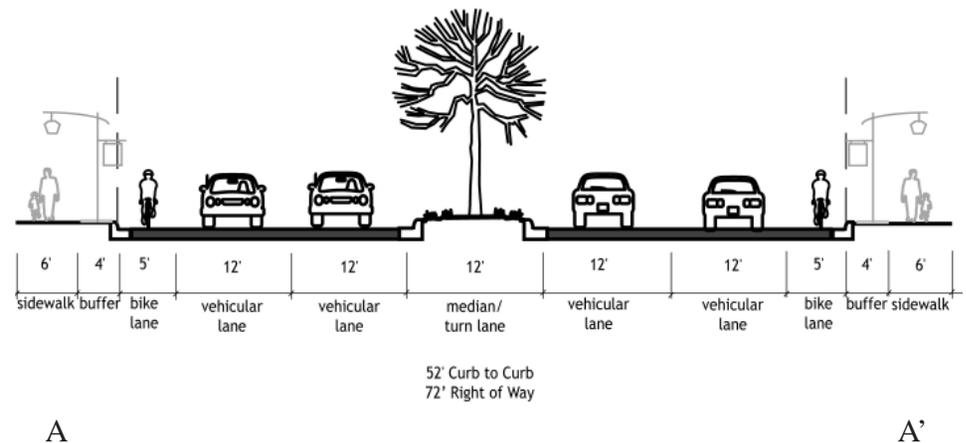
Reinken Avenue is currently configured with two travel lanes in each direction, a continuous center left turn lane, and sidewalks on both sides. East of 3rd Street, a five foot shoulder is also present. The existing cross section lacks many of the features found in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines for urban thoroughfares near rail stations. In order to facilitate more safe and accessible travel to and from the station as well as create a sense of arrival, it is recommended that Reinken Avenue be reconfigured.

The reconfiguration includes a median, which creates an opportunity to replicate landscaping described in previous projects and continue to strengthen the sense of place. It also controls access and allows left turns at specific intersections, limiting the vehicle interruptions along the sidewalk for pedestrians.

Project features include:

- Retain the two 12-foot travel lanes in each direction.
- Convert the continuous center left turn lane into a median with turn lanes at intersections or other access points.
- Retain existing curb and gutter in their current location.
- Stripe the existing 5 foot shoulder as a bike lane.
- Expand the sidewalk by 5 feet to create a buffer area and sidewalk. (The buffer area creates room for pedestrian lighting, wayfinding, and banners.)

**Reinken Avenue
(35 mph)**



Matchline on Page 19

CONCLUSION

The Belen Rail Runner Station Area Infrastructure & Development Workshop provided a unique opportunity to prioritize and select projects from the *Study* and begin a dialogue about the best ways to design and implement those projects. The projects listed in the *Study* were evaluated using the goals determined in the workshop. Using this strategy, workshop participants were able to select six projects that use urban design to create visual cues that enhance pedestrian wayfinding, connect the station area to the “Heart of Belen”, and ensure that improvement on Becker Ave between 1st & 3rd do not impact future movie opportunities.

Following the workshop, conversations with MRCOG brought to light two additional projects that are included in this document. These projects continue to strengthen the sense of place in Belen and use urban design to enhance wayfinding. In addition, they use infrastructure investment to encourage redevelopment east of the station. These projects will create safer and more accessible places for pedestrians and bicyclists using the Rail Runner Station in Belen.

As funding becomes available to the City, each of these projects will be ready for more detailed design and implementation.



Workshop in Progress