

The other side of the tracks

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 22 July 2022 06:18



Shipping containers may help revitalize Alpine Lumber site

Can the former Alpine Lumber Co. site north of downtown be transformed into a retail and

The other side of the tracks

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 22 July 2022 06:18

dining complex that would extend downtown activities and amenities to the other side of the tracks?

Not right away, and not without significant rehabilitation and investment. In addition to resolving environmental issues, recommendations include acquiring more adjacent land to make a bigger parcel that's more attractive to investors.

The city bought the 3.28-acre property at 104 N. Second St. in 2015. The lot is adjacent to the Gallup Arts and Cultural District and just north of the Downtown Gallup Historic District. There's a lot of agreement about where the site could fit into the city's overall goals of being a tourism destination that supports and markets local arts and culture.

A community working group set to work in January to look at possibilities based on what other communities have done with similar sites. It included surrounding uses, economic opportunities, local strengths and the city's desire to support new business growth without competing or conflicting with existing businesses.

"We ended up with two concepts that are doable, they're just going to require a nonprofit or a public-private arrangement with a really strong concessionaire, somebody that knows how to develop and run the whole site, manage all the leases and do the marketing," consultant Mark Lautman, of Lautman Economic Architecture, said. "It's not a single-user proposal."

The first concept, tentatively named The Yard @ Route 66, is really thinking inside the box – er, boxes – using shipping containers to keep costs down to around \$8 million. The other involves more traditional construction, and has a \$10 million price tag.

Both of the plans are mixed-use, arts and retail-centered projects, and both would seek to capitalize on Gallup's history as a railroad and trading post town. Both include artist studio space, some living spaces; outdoor activity space and an incubator to help budding entrepreneurs get off the ground. "That could include a fulfillment and distribution center to help artists market, package and ship their items," Phyllis Taylor, of city consultant Sites Southwest, said.

The other side of the tracks

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 22 July 2022 06:18

Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, thinks the ideas can work.

“Last week I was in Barstow and I stopped, I went downtown and there were restaurants inside of railroad cars,” she said. “We had lunch, it was like a food fair and they had retail shops in there and tourist shops, and it was the coolest thing I’ve ever seen.”

But before any development can happen, the site has several environmental problems that would need to be resolved. It’s alongside the Rio Puerco, which could flood, and the railroad tracks, so the city would want to get a railroad “quiet zone” for the area – which would fit with plans for the adjacent new library. Existing structures would have to be cleared, an underground storage tank removed, soil tested and possibly cleaned up. All together that’s expected to take three to five years, and any new structures would have to be built above the level of potential flooding.

Access is also an issue. Passing trains make intersections at Second and Third Streets impassable for about five hours a day when crossing gates are down. Data from May 2018 showed 93 crossing gate activations in a 24-hour period, with the shortest being 15 seconds and the longest at 18 minutes 12 seconds. The city and the New Mexico Department of Transportation are working on pedestrian improvements at those grade crossings and expect to finish them next year.

The quiet zone is a bit more challenging. City manager Maryann Ustick said the city has been trying to get that for about 30 years. NMDOT approved funding for some grade-level improvements at the train crossings, but the funding that NMDOT rail division is providing for design couldn’t be used for a quiet zone.

She’s asked the company working on crossing designs for two proposals: “One for the pedestrian safety improvements that we have to have, and that can be funded by this money, but with the same consultants looking at what additional improvements are necessary to qualify for a quiet zone,” Ustick said.

Another question is the proposed new library. “How it looks to us is very different depending on whether the library is across the street or it isn’t,” Taylor said. “In three to five years we think the site will be ready for development. Decisions will have been made to confirm exactly what the

The other side of the tracks

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 22 July 2022 06:18

character of the area is going to be going forward.”

For now, “The city is doing exactly what it needs to do with this property, which is move forward with site assessment and cleanup and looking at rezoning for heavy commercial, which allows the proposed uses,” Taylor said. ‘That’s really the big thing here, putting everything in place so someone can take a risk on a project that’s going to really change the character of what’s there now.”

By Holly J. Wagner
Sun Correspondent