

Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit for Las Cruces



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Project Team Contacts

ESMpr

Cody Gildart
Public Relations
23 East Fine Avenue
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
(928)226-0236
(928)226-0237 fax
cgildart@esmaz.com

City of Las Cruces

Carol McCall
Planner
Community Development Department
P.O. Box 20000
Las Cruces, NM 88004
(575)528-3209
(575)528-3155 fax
cmccall@las-cruces.org

U. S. Environmental Protection Agency

Clark Wilson
Office of Sustainable Communities
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW [MC 1807T]
Washington, DC 20460
(202)566-2880
(202)566-2868 fax
wilson.clark@epa.gov
www.epa.gov/smartgrowth

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I. BACKGROUND

The city of Las Cruces is committed to developing a robust public participation model that includes deliberative planning and visioning processes. To that end, the city applied for technical assistance through the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Smart Growth Implementation Assistance program (see Appendix A for a description of the program). The goal was to develop a Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit that include strategies that invite and maintain the participation of all residents, especially ethnically diverse, low-income populations and others that have had limited to no previous involvement in community planning and design. Creative outreach and participation strategies that focus more on pictures than words were tested in two visioning workshops for the El Paseo corridor, a 1.7-mile corridor that extends southeast from Main Street in downtown Las Cruces to the New Mexico State University campus. The Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit summarize the process this project created and includes many, but not all, of the outreach and participation tools the project used to begin developing a vision for the El Paseo corridor. The plan and toolkit are intended to be used by city staff for all city efforts requiring public involvement.

Through the assistance, the city hopes to:

- Implement new public participation models that use multiple and non-traditional techniques to engage—and build collaborations among—the government, residents, and other stakeholders.
- Demonstrate the application of public participation tools to redevelopment efforts in the El Paseo corridor area that support fair choices in housing, mobility, and commercial activity.
- Develop options for how a public participation strategy or toolkit could be applied to the city’s larger, comprehensive planning efforts.

EPA selected the city of Las Cruces because of the city’s interest in developing inclusive public participation strategies that would help Las Cruces become a more sustainable and equitable community by:

- Promoting biking and walking as a safe alternative to driving.
- Reusing brownfields and vacant and underused parcels, thereby reducing pressure to develop on open space and agricultural land.
- Encouraging a mix of residential and commercial uses for residents and visitors regardless of race, ethnicity, or income level in the El Paseo corridor, as well as throughout the city.

- Incorporating landscaping into street design and site development to reduce flooding and improve water quality (commonly referred to as “green infrastructure”).

Though written specifically for city of Las Cruces staff and decision-makers, the strategies and tools compiled in this document will be useful for many other communities wishing to expand the conversations about development to include populations that have often remained outside of decision-making process because of socioeconomic issues and language barriers. A more inclusive decision-making process can help communities identify and decide upon policies that encourage development that is good for the environment, the economy, public health, and the community.

“Picturing El Paseo” – A Snapshot

The El Paseo corridor was selected by Las Cruces staff as the location to test public involvement practices because of its potential to accommodate future mixed-use, development that would still serve the needs of existing residents and users. Staff from EPA, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), along with the EPA contractor ESMpr and city of Las Cruces staff, made up the project team that developed a public involvement process and selected (and sometimes created) specific involvement tools.

El Paseo Road is an active corridor with a mix of uses and a diverse population, many of whom rely on public transit or walking to get around, including low-income families, senior citizens, and high school and university students. The corridor is home to some of the highest commercial vacancy rates in the city. The design is heavily automobile-oriented and is dominated by strip malls separated from the street by vast, mostly empty parking lots. These design factors, combined with heavy automobile traffic, make the area unpleasant and dangerous to pedestrians.

In the spring and summer of 2010, city staff undertook extensive community outreach in preparation for workshops in the fall using the outreach tools described in Section IV. Strategies ranged from using social media and establishing a project website (www.picturingelpaseo.org) to more direct engagement with citizens through an activity called “Planners with Scanners.” In this activity, city staff went out into the community to senior centers, coffee shops, and other places to gather stories about what El Paseo used to be—a vibrant street where one would go to “see and be seen.”

The two “Picturing El Paseo” visioning workshops were held in the fall of 2010 to test outreach and participation strategies collected and developed by the project team. The first visioning workshop was held in October 2010. This workshop was for invited stakeholder groups to test participation techniques and to train city staff to lead the second visioning workshop. A photobook created to summarize the activities is included in Appendix B. The second public

workshop was held in November and was open to the public. In both workshops, activities were very visual: annotating maps, using visual preference surveys on computers, and artists drawing participants' ideas for El Paseo in real time. Participants were also broken into small groups to assemble photographs that city staff collected from people prior to the workshop into a collage that illustrated what they liked and did not like about the corridor area.

As part of the visioning process, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funded a one-day road safety audit in October 2010. A road safety audit is a formal safety performance evaluation of an existing or future road or intersection conducted by an independent, multidisciplinary team. The El Paseo team included representatives from FHWA, the city of Las Cruces, Las Cruces Police Department, New Mexico Department of Transportation, Las Cruces RoadRUNNER Transit, and Las Cruces Municipal Planning Organization. The audit's preliminary recommendations included improving crosswalks and sidewalks and reducing the number of driveways off of El Paseo. The recommendations are generally consistent with the comments from participants of both workshops.

Finally, the city also hosted a green infrastructure workshop in August 2010. The workshop, developed by the city of Las Cruces staff with EPA assistance, was for local design and engineering professionals, city staff, and decision-makers. The purpose was to present and educate participants in green infrastructure practices appropriate for an arid climate such as Las Cruces. The workshop preceded the El Paseo visioning workshop and complemented the visioning efforts by educating city staff about green infrastructure techniques, which allowed them to include a session about these techniques in the visioning workshops.

The Picturing El Paseo workshops and associated activities provided the city with a rich collection of images and written comments that city staff began to analyze in early 2011. City staff and leaders hope that El Paseo can one day return to being the heart of Las Cruces.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Public Involvement Plan and Toolkit provide a framework for meaningful public engagement and the outreach and participation strategies necessary to build trust, excitement, and support among Las Cruces residents for a city project or initiative. When done correctly, public involvement creates the opportunity for mutually equitable outcomes, growth that increases economic vitality, and environmental stewardship. These initiatives can result in a more equitable, environmentally responsible, and economically healthy Las Cruces that is appreciated by residents and visitors.

Successful public involvement means including all voices—the traditionally represented as well as underrepresented groups. Traditionally represented groups include politicians, developers, philanthropists, and voting constituencies who routinely participate in civic affairs. Underrepresented groups include those who have, for a variety of reasons, not participated. These groups might include people with limited mobility, the learning impaired, non-English speakers, youth, those ineligible to vote, and the low income. These voices are important parts of a rich social dialogue and bringing them together can inform the planning process in ways that create more environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable outcomes for all participants.

Involving the community requires time and resources, but community involvement is worth the effort for several reasons:

- Everyone is treated equally.
- Incorporating substantive public input increases the likelihood that the public will support the project.
- Proactive public involvement can reduce or eliminate disputes by bringing public and stakeholder interests together at key project stages.
- The project can be improved by bringing an informed citizenry together with professionals.
- Development can be expedited with a clear mandate from the community.
- Trust is created between the city and the community.

The plan presented here outlines the necessary steps for establishing realistic goals, selecting appropriate outreach and participation strategies from the accompanying toolkit, evaluating the results, and sharing those results with the community.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN PROCESS

Though the specifics for each public involvement effort will depend on the city project or effort, the process to develop a Public Involvement Plan involves six steps:

1. Ask the key questions.
2. Set the goals and expected outcomes of public involvement.
3. Develop outreach and participation for the Public Involvement Plan.
4. Perform outreach and participation as outlined in your plan.
5. Evaluate the results against plan goals and outcomes.
6. Share the results.

1. Ask the Key Questions

The first step asks four key questions. These questions determine if the plan should move forward. If the answer to any one of these questions is “no,” then the city should change the plan to address concerns or determine if the plan should be cancelled.

The four key questions are:

- A. Do we have the right team?
- B. Do we have the time?
- C. Do we have the resources?
- D. Does our plan meet legal requirements?

A. Do we have the right team?

This plan is intended for all city of Las Cruces departments, since public involvement is not under any single department’s purview. All city-led projects benefit from public involvement whether it is a redesign of a particular street, a new housing development, a new park project, or even a new budget process. Many projects and initiatives will benefit greatly from cross-departmental cooperation. The team, though led by a particular department, could also include staff from other departments that have an interest in the outcomes. This would not only improve communication among departments but also expand the participation of community stakeholders that traditionally may have only been involved in the activities of one specific department. A diversity of voices will ultimately produce richer results.

B. Do we have the time?

The time needed for a public involvement process can vary greatly. Typically, three months of outreach prior to the involvement activities (e.g. public workshops) will be enough time to raise

awareness through the Internet and media and to engage community-based organizations and other interested parties.

C. Do we have the resources?

Sufficient resources are needed to put the plan into action, including time and staff to develop the plan, generate all materials needed, and perform the outreach and participation tasks. Tasks can be resource intensive, and a team of staff members or volunteers will probably be required.

Language considerations must be taken into account during the execution of the public involvement plan. All information should be available in both English and Spanish in both print form and through simultaneous verbal translation at meetings. Spanish-language information should be presented in the local dialect and use plain language free of technical jargon. Staff should consult with native speakers regarding each initiative governed by this plan to ensure that Spanish information adequately matches all English materials in content, form, and tone. In addition to producing materials in the two most commonly used languages in the area, the city should accommodate those who speak other languages. Showing the willingness to translate materials to make them more accessible will demonstrate to target audiences the city's commitment to engaging them, and they will hopefully appreciate the effort to communicate and be more interested in working with the city.

D. Does our plan meet legal requirements?

Regulations and laws at various levels of government affect public involvement, often requiring specific outreach activities or participation techniques. All legal requirements will need to be considered as the city implements the plan to create legally defensible processes. The following legal issues are among the requirements that the city might need to address, where appropriate, in the plan:

- Americans with Disabilities Act
- National Environmental Policy Act
- Federal Transportation Planning Requirements
- Environmental Justice Requirements
- Housing and Urban Development Requirements
- State of New Mexico Open Meetings Act
- State of New Mexico Inspection of Public Records

2. Set Goals and Outcomes

Setting goals for the plan is important to determine the activities that comprise the plan and to evaluate the success of public involvement. The goals and desired outcomes should be defined in

a document that all involved parties have a chance to review prior to involvement activities. If the goal is to create a community-driven design, an expected outcome would be substantive public input to give to designers. Writing these expected outcomes down makes evaluating the involvement process after the plan has been completed much easier.

3. Develop Outreach and Participation Activities

After asking the key questions and setting the goals, the city should develop specific outreach and participation activities. Outreach and participation tools are described in the toolkit in Section IV. Outreach activities should be well defined and include details such as target audience, budgetary implications, and who is responsible for developing and distributing outreach materials or performing outreach activities. Participation activities should be described so they can be understood by the public and should include details such as step-by-step instructions to perform the activity, the results that will be generated, and how the results will be used. Describing the outreach and participation activities creates a work plan that will guide the project team and become part of the public record of the project. Additionally, defining public involvement activities in writing clearly lays out the city's commitment to involving the public.

4. Perform Outreach and Participation Activities

After the public involvement plan for the project or initiative is crafted, it should be reviewed and discussed by the project team—those who will actually perform the outreach and participation tasks. Team members need to be realistic in understanding the amount of work involved in producing the outreach materials, distributing these materials, developing participation, and facilitating participation exercises. Additionally, team members will benefit from occasionally taking a step back, looking at the big picture, and ensuring that they are honestly listening to other people.

5. Evaluate the Results

Upon completing the involvement activities, team members should evaluate the input received and the process used. The results of this evaluation can be as important as any input gathered, as the lessons learned can help improve subsequent plans.

A successful public involvement process may result in a great deal of public input, often gathered through multiple methods. This input needs to be carefully examined and summarized. Then the input should be shared with the public, allowing the public to “double check” the results. This step also maintains transparency in the involvement process. All input should be

synthesized into a format that is clear and understandable to the public and to future staff and decision-makers to provide insight into the process used to gather it.

After synthesizing public input, the team should evaluate the entire public involvement process to identify lessons learned. This exercise will help the team determine which activities were most successful in meeting the goals. If the process and the results align with the expected outcomes and goals, the lessons learned can provide guidance for similar success in the future. If there is a disparity between outcomes and expectations or if goals were not met, then the city should consider how future attempts at similar involvement could be modified. Furthermore, even if outcomes are not what were expected, sharing this fact can build public trust by demonstrating that the city values honest, transparent communication and not just results.

7. Share the Results

As with all aspects of the public involvement plan, the performance evaluation should be well documented. By writing documents that describe the processes, the results, and the evaluation of those results and processes, the city creates a public record for each initiative. This public record helps staff look back on the process and understand the effort involved, the benefits realized, and the lessons learned. The documents also allow all members of the community to share in the project's success and facilitates public dialogue about the results of public involvement processes. The city can keep two-way communication open after sharing the results to give the public avenues to comment on these results. Comments regarding the results can steer decision-making, gauge public sentiment, and develop buy-in from stakeholder groups, other city departments, and the public.

Tailoring the Public Involvement Plan to a Project

To tailor this plan to a specific project, the team needs to determine what level of involvement is needed and set the goals accordingly. The goals outlined for the plan will drive the outreach and participation tools described in Section IV. Outreach requires identifying target audiences and specific strategies to reach these audiences. In participation, the techniques will change depending on the type and level of participation needed to develop the input the project needs. The Public Participation Spectrum (Figure 1) can be used to determine the level and type of involvement for the project. The spectrum can be used as a sliding scale of public involvement that starts with basic involvement that simply informs and goes up to empowering the public to make decisions. A particular project will fall somewhere on this scale, and the team can “slide” the outreach and participation activities to meet the needs of the project or initiative.

Increasing Level of Public Impact						
Public Participation Goal	Inform To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	Consult To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	Involve To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	Collaborate To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Empower To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.	
Example Techniques	Fact Sheets Web Sites Open House	Focus Groups Surveys Public Meetings with Exercise	Workshops Visioning Exercises	Advisory Committees Consensus Building	Citizen Juries Ballots Delegated Decisions	

Specific tools for Outreach and Participation are outlined in the Toolkit.



Figure 1. International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum (<http://www.iap2.org/>)

Summary

This public involvement plan process provides specific methods to reach out to and involve the public in municipal actions. This engagement allows interested parties to learn about and influence decisions that affect their community. Decision-makers can use the public involvement process to gauge public sentiment and gather helpful input for current and proposed policies and projects. The community has a better chance of reaching equitable outcomes when all parties are involved, informed, and included in decision-making. By using this tool for decision-making, a community can make decisions that balance economic vitality, equity among citizens, and environmental stewardship. By honestly and earnestly seeking to incorporate public aspirations, advice, concerns, and considerations, the city of Las Cruces creates a great opportunity to move forward in the best interest of all community members.

IV. TOOLKIT

Introduction

The toolkit contains outreach and participation tools the city could use in their involvement process. Like any tool used to repair or build something, the tools described in this section are designed to be used in concert with one another to accomplish the goals and objectives established for a particular public involvement effort. The toolkit includes:

- **Outreach tools** to inform and engage all segments of the population, including those who may be affected by an initiative, the general population, and those who have traditionally been underrepresented.
- **Participation tools** to create and document useful input.

Certain tools will prove widely useful and could be used frequently on multiple projects or on iterative efforts. Other, more specialized tools may not get used as often but are available in this toolkit should they be needed. As work moves forward, new tools may be needed to perform a specific function. These tools can be added to the toolkit using the New Tool Worksheet in Appendix B.

Upon completion of any public outreach or involvement effort, city staff should write a summary memo that documents and analyzes comments received. The memo should also document the tools used and the success of those tools in achieving the effort's goals. Lessons learned will help with subsequent outreach and involvement activities. To assist in evaluation efforts, the team can use the Evaluation Worksheet in Appendix B.

Finally, staff availability is crucial to the success of any outreach and participation efforts. As noted in Section III, a cross-departmental project team should be established at the beginning of any effort. On that team should be a primary staff contact who responds to public inquiries and forwards correspondence to the appropriate project team member for timely response.

Outreach Tools

Outreach tools help connect staff and elected officials with audiences to develop awareness of and participation in the project under consideration. These tools also provide basic project information and direct interested parties to additional resources that give more information. In general, implementing as many of these tools as possible will provide more information to the community about a project and the opportunities to become involved. Outreach should be two-pronged—focused outreach to specific residents and stakeholders whose input is needed for an

inclusive involvement and more general outreach to reach a broader audience. Focused outreach involves city staff going out into the community—reaching the businesses, religious institutions, schools, and social clubs of those residents who have, for any number of reasons, not been engaged in city planning and policy efforts. Involvement strategies to reach a broader audience include more traditional media campaigns (e.g., flyers, posters, websites, or radio spots) but also social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Although the “more is better” approach may be tempered by time and budget constraints, the city should go straight to the people to involve them.

A. Project Announcement

A project announcement is a simple, one-page description of the effort that the city is undertaking. It tells readers who is involved, what the project is, where and when it is happening, and how the process will work. It is developed in print and digital formats and released to the public, businesses, institutions, agencies, and members of the community who are targeted for outreach. The announcement should be translated into the predominant languages of the community. In print format, the announcement may take the form of a flyer, bulk mail piece, or poster. The digital format can be an image file or a PDF that is uploaded to a relevant website, used in social media, or sent by e-newsletter. Costs may be higher if the city uses professional graphic design, certain distribution methods, or multiple distribution methods.

B. Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations are groups that serve a broad range of community interests. Organizations include senior centers; civic groups; business organizations; community development corporations, churches and other faith-based organizations; service clubs; schools that provide English as a second language programs; service providers for youths, families, and persons with disabilities; and many others.

Community-based organizations provide the opportunity to connect with specific audiences and are an integral part of identifying and reaching out to underrepresented groups. The city can reach out to specific organizations to provide these groups with project information and encourage them to become involved. Should these groups have specific needs that might affect the involvement process, the city should clearly outline strategies to meet those needs. For example, organizations that represent people whose first language is not English should be invited to participate in exercises where they can receive information and provide input in the language with which they are most comfortable. Often, the organization can provide the venue and opportunity to meet with the group and perform a participation tool exercise, such as a coffee circle (described in the Participation Tools section).

C. School Partnerships

School administrations can publish information in school websites or newsletters or send email to distribution lists to engage students and their parents. Outreach activities can also be integrated into school curricula to inform students about a project through activities such as learning games and field trips. In high school, educators can create modules for classes and clubs involved in activities such as photography, computer science, art, civics, or creative writing. For instance, if the city of Las Cruces is undertaking a planning effort for a particular neighborhood, students of the local school could undertake a history project documenting the neighborhood. Or a multimedia class could produce short films documenting a “day in the life” of neighborhood residents.

D. Project Website

A project-specific website gives detailed and extensive information and allows for two-way communication. It should complement, not replace, other outreach and involvement efforts, since many people do not have access to the Internet or do not use it frequently. The website can stand alone or could be integrated into the city’s existing website. If possible, the city should use an intuitive URL, such as [www.\[project name\].org](http://www.[project name].org) or [www.\[city name\].gov/\[project name\]](http://www.[city name].gov/[project name]). Websites should be easy to access and to navigate and have translations available in Spanish or other appropriate languages.

E. Social Media

Social media and social networking websites include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs. For any initiative, the city could create a social media strategy and invite target audiences (identified using city email lists or previously interested groups) to participate. It is important to choose the social media and networking platforms that have the best chance of reaching the intended audience. If the medium allows for public commenting, the project team should moderate those comments to ensure content is appropriate.

F. Electronic Newsletters

Email newsletters quickly and easily disseminate information to contact lists. While e-newsletters can be inexpensive if sent electronically through a listserv, an e-newsletter service may provide a more attractive-looking and engaging newsletter, but at an increased cost.

G. Media Campaign

A comprehensive regional media campaign often is the primary source of outreach to the broader community. A media campaign might include press releases, public service announcements, press conferences with community leaders, feature articles, or interviews, depending on the nature of the project and the resources available. To ensure media exposure, the city could buy advertisements but should do so strategically to keep costs low. Keeping a consistent media message across all channels requires generating and distributing talking points to project team members.

Participation Tools

Participation tools are designed to create a meaningful dialogue between city staff and the community. Each participation tool is a structured activity that allows participants to learn about the project, ask questions, and provide comments. The input that is generated in participation activities can be used for analysis, and create buy-in for a project. Similar to outreach tools, participation tools can be used in combination with one another to elicit input from target audiences through multiple avenues, which is especially useful when participation is desired from several different groups in a community.

The first set of participation tools described in this section focus on face-to-face meetings, with a particular emphasis on city staff going to places where a particular population already gathers. This effort pays off by demonstrating that city staff is committed to hearing the concerns of those groups who do not participate in more conventional public processes such as larger community meeting and workshops. These tools include ones that help participants create a vision for their community. Several of the visioning tools use pictures to tell a story. Using images is not only more fun for participants, but also more inclusive and equitable in that it relies less on words to express ideas and concerns. This technique is most helpful when working with community members who might not speak or read English well or with children and young people who find images more exciting than words.

The project website and social media described in the outreach section remain pertinent to participation efforts. A project-specific website can be used to disseminate information and gather comments. Additionally, social media websites can allow people to create and exchange content about a specific topic. Again, a major caveat is that not everyone has access to or the ability to use the Internet, so online tools should complement, nor replace, face-to-face participation tools.

A. Meeting with the Public

The term “meeting with the public” is used deliberately to differentiate from “public meeting.” Meeting with the public means actively going into the community, talking with community members about a particular city initiative, and most importantly, *listening* to their concerns. Though potentially staff intensive, the time committed to informal meetings can build a significant amount of trust with the community. Feedback is likely to be more candid since staff is on the residents’ “turf,” and people can discuss their concerns in conversation rather than having to speak in front of a large group, which many people find intimidating. Furthermore, community members may feel more engaged in the process and thus be more willing to attend larger, traditional-format community meetings and workshops.

Meetings with Community-Based Organizations – As described in Section III, community-based organizations include senior centers, civic groups, business organizations, churches, service clubs, and others. Community-based organizations often host meetings that provide an opportunity for city staff to discuss particular city initiatives and projects. Meeting with groups at their regularly scheduled meeting times and in their format demonstrates a willingness to work with the group to listen and understand their position.

Coffee Circles – A coffee circle is a small meeting with a specific group, generally in an informal setting such as a person’s home, a business, or a community center. To generate conversation, the facilitator can start by asking engaging questions such as “What was it like here when you were growing up?” or “Where is your favorite place in town to spend time, and why?” Once the conversation is flowing, the facilitator can get into the specifics of the project.

World Café – A world café is a specialized technique using a leaderless dialogue that simulates café-style conversation, where small groups engage in conversation to explore a given topic. To set up the meeting space, tables are placed around the room, each one accommodating four to six people. A host is stationed at each table to listen, take notes, and facilitate discussion, not to lead the group discussion. Each group should discuss the topic, listen to each other’s viewpoints, and share their views. Participants switch tables periodically, while each host remains, allowing ideas to move around the room.

See: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/knowledgesharing/meetings.htm>

B. Public Meetings

More conventional meeting formats are described below. At all meetings, staff should provide sign-in sheets and comment cards. In addition to comment cards, participants could be asked to

fill out a card at the beginning of the meeting stating their concerns and motivation for attending the meeting. This is their “declarative statement.” These cards could be posted on a bulletin board so others can read them. At the conclusion of the meeting, participants would be asked to revisit the cards and fill out the other side with “what they heard” and if their opinion on issues has changed. This before–and–after response will help city staff gauge how effective their messaging has been and where there is room for improvement.

Community Meeting – The community meeting is a structured meeting with an agenda during which the project team conveys information, listens to comments, and answers questions. It may include a formal presentation, a question-and-answer session, and an informal discussion period.

Open House Meeting – An open house meeting provides more opportunities for the project team and public to interact informally. An open house uses information stations staffed by project team members, allowing the public to talk with those involved in the project to learn more and provide input. This type of format is useful to gather input from participants who may not feel comfortable speaking in front of a group. It is good practice to have two team members at each station so one can focus on speaking with participants while the other records input.

Workshop – Workshops engage the public in interactive exercises to develop ideas and input. Workshops provide a venue for discussions of goals and alternatives, as well as creative problem-solving. Activities chosen for a workshop depend on the demographics of the group and what kinds of responses the staff hopes to elicit.

Design Charrette – A charrette is a collaborative design event that lasts multiple days. A multidisciplinary charrette team, consisting of consultants and sponsor staff, produces the plan. Stakeholders—those being anyone who can approve, promote or block the project as well as anyone directly affected by the outcomes—are involved through a series of short feedback loops or meetings. Most stakeholders attend two or three feedback meetings at critical decision-making points during the charrette. These feedback loops provide the charrette team with the information necessary to create a feasible plan. Just as importantly, they allow the stakeholders to become co-authors of the plan so that they are more likely to support and implement it. Charrettes takes place in a charrette studio situated on or near the project site. The charrette team first conducts an open public meeting to solicit the values, vision, and needs of the stakeholders. The team then breaks off to create alternative plans or scenarios, which are presented in a second public meeting usually a day or two later. The team then synthesizes the best aspects of the alternatives into a preferred plan that is developed in detail and tested for economic, design and political feasibility. The charrette concludes with a comprehensive presentation at a final public meeting.

See: <http://www.charretteinstitute.org/>

Expert Panels – An expert panel is a public meeting that mimics the “Meet the Press” format. A panel of media representatives or a facilitator interviews experts to show an issue from different perspectives. A neutral facilitator ensures a balanced discussion. The public can be involved in a question-and answer-session following the panel.

Focus Groups – Focus groups are a message-testing forum with selected members of a target audience. Testers show these individuals messages and interview them to gauge their reaction to those messages.

Fishbowl – A fishbowl is a small group of people, generally between five to eight individuals, seated in a circle, having a conversation in full view of a larger audience. The fishbowl is most often an open discussion, with public officials, decision-makers, or stakeholders taking “permanent” chairs at the table, with several chairs open to members of the audience who want to sit down and discuss an issue. Audience members can move to the central table as issues are discussed and when the discussion moves to another issue, that individual returns to the audience, opening a chair for someone else. This format allows the public to participate in a conversation that can answer questions and aid in understanding the decision-making process, especially where controversial or “hot button” issues are concerned. While significant moderation is not needed, a facilitator may help the discussion progress smoothly.

See: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/knowledgesharing/meetings.htm>

Webinar – A webinar is a meeting that is presented online. Currently, technology allows for public meeting “webcasting,” or broadcasting via the Internet, and two-way electronic communication. While webcasting can be relatively simple, participatory techniques are difficult to implement in a webinar format. As technology improves, webinars may emerge as an increasingly useful tool.

C. Visioning

Visioning exercises can take several forms and can be incorporated into the meeting formats previously listed. Visioning tools can be used to solicit public ideas in the initial stages or to help shape components of the project as it evolves. At each stage, if the results of the visioning process are shared with the public for ongoing feedback, the public is reassured that their input shapes the community vision to the greatest degree possible. Visioning performed early and throughout the life of the project helps ensure that the public vision is realized as the project moves through the municipal decision-making process towards implementation. Material gathered can be synthesized in various ways, which will depend largely on the anticipated use of the input when the exercise is designed. All input should be treated equally and collected in such

a way that the public involvement process moves forward and is informed by this input. The input should include a detailed explanation of the visioning exercise that aided its development.

Shared Perspectives – A shared perspective exercise uses a photograph or image of an existing condition and an overlay sheet of trace paper on which an artist can draw. The artist or another member of the team talks with a participant about the particular issues illustrated in the photos and elicits ideas about what the participant would like to see there instead. The artist captures these ideas immediately and draws them on the trace paper on top of the photograph in front of the participant. In essence, the artist is serving as the hands for the participant. This type of activity generates a lot of excitement, and participants can be invited to do their own drawings if they want. The result is a rich set of images that can be categorized according to common visions that emerge and discussed afterwards in a meeting of all participants.

Mapping Exercise – A mapping exercise uses a map or aerial photograph to help develop input regarding a specific geographic area, location, or corridor. The input can be free flowing and cover a range of topics, or it can be targeted to gather input on a specific topic, idea, or issue. In cases where a discussion of alternatives is part of the process, two alternative maps can be used to develop input. Mapping exercises can be performed in various ways. One way involves printing large maps and encouraging the public to draw or write their ideas on the maps themselves. This input can then be scanned, photographed, or catalogued. A facilitator is present to explain the map, answer questions, guide input gathering, and keep the discussion focused. Some participants may have difficulty reading maps at first, so it is helpful to have printed eye-level photographs of places depicted in the map to help participants get their bearings. Another method is to ask participants to draw their own maps based on their knowledge of the area of interest. These maps, though likely crudely drawn, can be valuable in highlighting how the participant experiences the area.

Photovoice – Photovoice is a participation tool developed at the University of Michigan. The underlying principles are that that images teach, and pictures can influence policy. It is a facilitated process where participants use photographs to explain how they perceive their current circumstances and also explain what they like and do not like. Pictures can be collected through a variety of means; participants can bring their own photos to a workshop event or upload photos to the project website prior to an event for city staff to print. Another method is distributing disposable digital cameras before the event; staff can download the images at the meeting and print the photos on site. Alternatively, staff could distribute cameras at the event and take participants on a tour of a project area, allowing them to note their likes and dislikes with pictures rather than words. The “comments” gathered through Photovoice are images that are assembled by participants (with assistance from a facilitator) into collages. These images can be presented as a public art display to generate community awareness of issues, to create a collage or educational tool, or to generate a lively discussion.

See: <http://heb.sagepub.com/content/24/3/369.short>

Visual Preference Survey – In a visual preference survey, participants look at two pictures of a similar place or element—e.g. a street with on-street parking versus a street without parking, or an stream with a pathway along it versus one without a path that looks more natural. Participants are then asked to select which image they prefer. Surveys can be taken on computers or using display boards and a ballot sheet. Public feedback developed through the visual preference survey is most helpful in determining public opinion related design aesthetics.

Computer Simulations – Computer simulations are an increasingly useful visioning tool in helping the public understand choices, see possible future scenarios, or see how their input may be used. At a basic level, a computer simulation is similar to the shared perspective exercise in showing simple before-and-after representations of how a project might look when complete based on participant comments. Simulations are developed by a professional graphic designer or architectural renderer and can be time-intensive, depending upon the desired quality of the final image. The most basic image looks like a photographic collage. This exercise therefore is best suited to a multi-day charrette where participants can see the image or images evolve over the course of the event. Typically, the designer will take these images back to his or her office to create a more realistic image.

Keypad Polling – Keypad polling is where participants use handheld remote devices that allow them to vote on polling questions at a public meeting. The exercise is included in the visioning section because the results of the polling are shown immediately on a screen. The facilitator uses the outcomes to guide discussion. Polling is anonymous so those who do not feel comfortable publicly voicing their opinions can still share their thoughts.

D. Tours and Audits

Tours are facilitated group excursions that help participants familiarize themselves with a project area. Audits are similar but involve developing inventories to provide quantifiable data regarding the typical public experience. Both activities have city staff, designers, officials, and community participants walking through their community to identify issues that affect the public. Although participants may feel that they are already familiar with the study area, a facilitated tour or audit helps them see the area with a new perspective. Walking tours are most helpful when a study area is relatively compact or when a workshop's goal is assessing the pedestrian experience of a street or neighborhood. For large study areas, vans or buses may be needed.

E. Simulation Games

Simulation games are exercises that lay out a set of real or hypothetical conditions and ask participants to simulate a decision based on those conditions. While these games may be resource intensive to develop and test, simulation can be an effective participatory technique.

Budget Exercise – The budget exercise is a method to develop a vision while working with budgetary constraints. The exercise gives participants hypothetical amount of money and asks them to choose how to spend the money. This exercise encourages people to prioritize wants and needs in a scenario that mimics what decision-makers face. The budget exercise can be performed in various ways, generally dictated by the meeting and the initiative. When possible, budgetary constraints and alternatives or choices should mimic the applicable scenario facing decision-makers. The budget exercise can use a worksheet, or a Monopoly-style game, representing budget dollars. The budgets created in this exercise will help project organizers better understand public priorities and spending concerns. These conclusions should be documented for later reference to substantiate decisions that might be made about the project.

Wikipanning — Wikipanning offers an integrated approach using technologies that are increasingly available to the public. Using the Wikipanning tools, residents are invited to log into their community's project website and then are led through a series of activities throughout the project life. These activities include a mix of project-specific, multimedia learning sessions, online chats, message boards, surveys, and podcasts offering walking tours through the project's principal sites. Although some sessions, like chats, would occur in real-time, most activities can be arranged around participants' schedules.

See: <http://www.wikipanning.org/index.php?P=virtualcharrette>

V. Appendices

Appendix A – EPA’s Smart Growth Implementation Assistance (SGIA) Program

Appendix B – Picturing El Paseo Photobook

Appendix C– Worksheets

- Evaluation Worksheet
- New Tool Worksheet

Appendix A

EPA's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program (SGIA)

Communities around the country want to foster economic growth, protect environmental resources, and plan for development. In many cases they need additional tools, resources or information to achieve these goals. In response to this need the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Sustainable Communities launched the Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program in 2005 to provide technical assistance through contractor services to selected communities. EPA assembles teams of specialized consultants, bringing together expertise that meets a particular community's needs. While working with community participants to understand their aspiration for development, the teams bring experience from working in other parts of the country to provide best practices for consideration by the assisted community. The goal of the program is to help participating communities attain their goals, while also producing a resource (such as a report or set of guidelines) that can be useful to a broad range of communities facing similar challenges.

The Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program is designed to help communities achieve growth that supports economic, community and environmental goals. People in communities around the country are frustrated by development that gives them no choice about driving long distances between where they live, work and shop; that require costly expenditures to extend sewers, roads and public services to support new development; that uses up natural areas and farmland for development while land and buildings lie empty in already developed areas; and that makes it difficult for working people to rent or buy a home because of development that focuses only on one or two costly housing types. Smart growth strategies create new neighborhoods and maintain existing ones that are attractive, convenient, safe and healthy. They foster design that encourages social, civic and physical activity. They protect the environment while stimulating economic growth. Most of all, they create more choices for residents, workers, visitors, children, families, single people, and older adults—choices in where to live, how to get around, and how to interact with the people around them. When communities undertake this kind of planning, they preserve the best of the past while creating a bright future for generations to come.

More information about the program, including information on how to apply and links to reports from past recipients can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sgia.htm>.

PHOTOBOOK

Visioning Workshop #1

October 1 & October 2, 2010



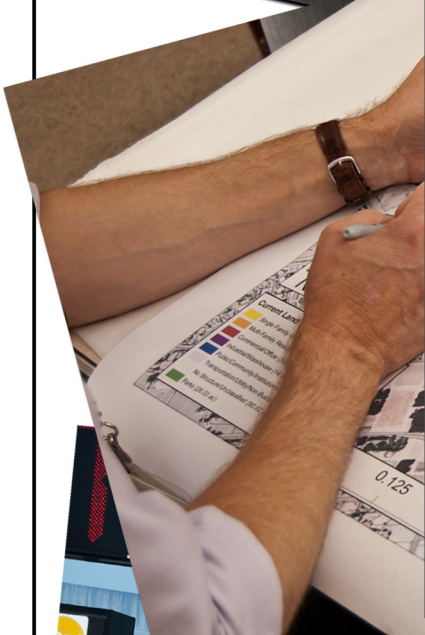
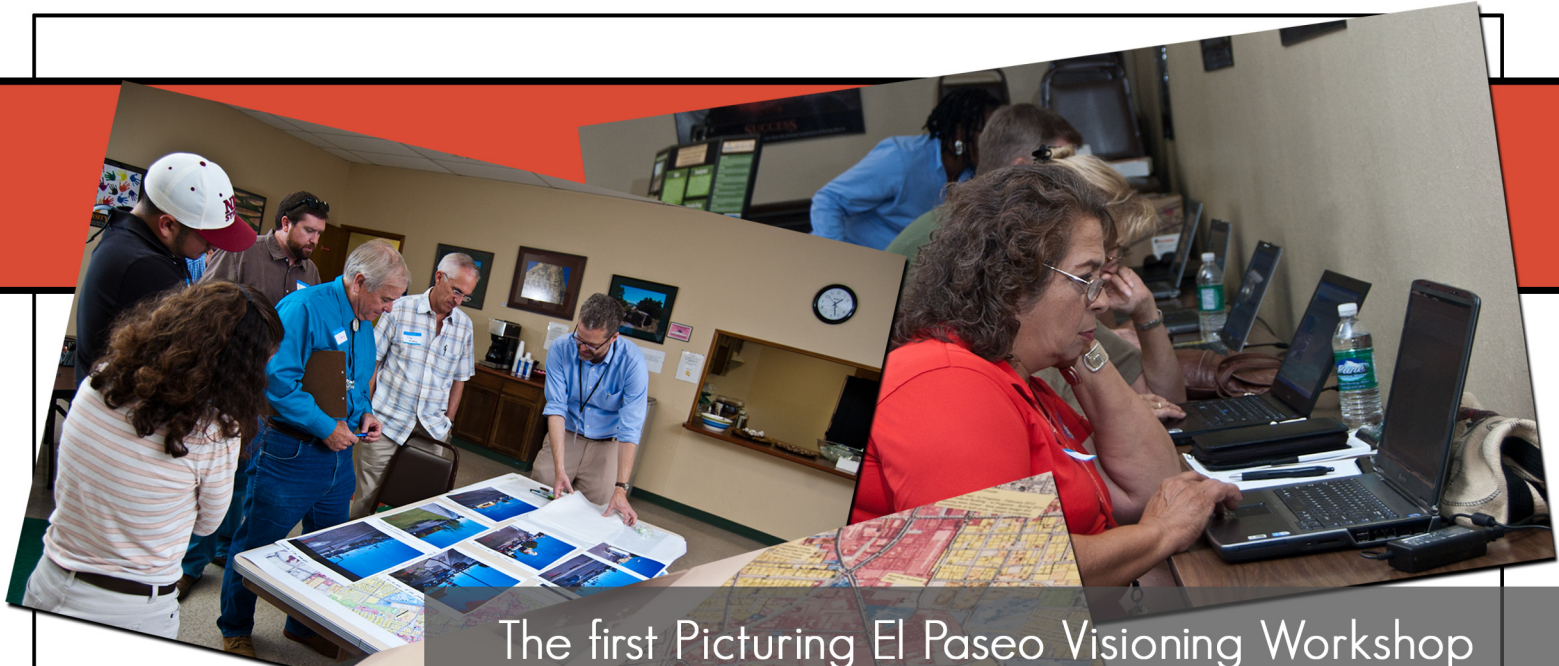
City of Las Cruces
PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE



p **i** **c** **t** **u** **r** **i** **n** **g**

el *Paseo*

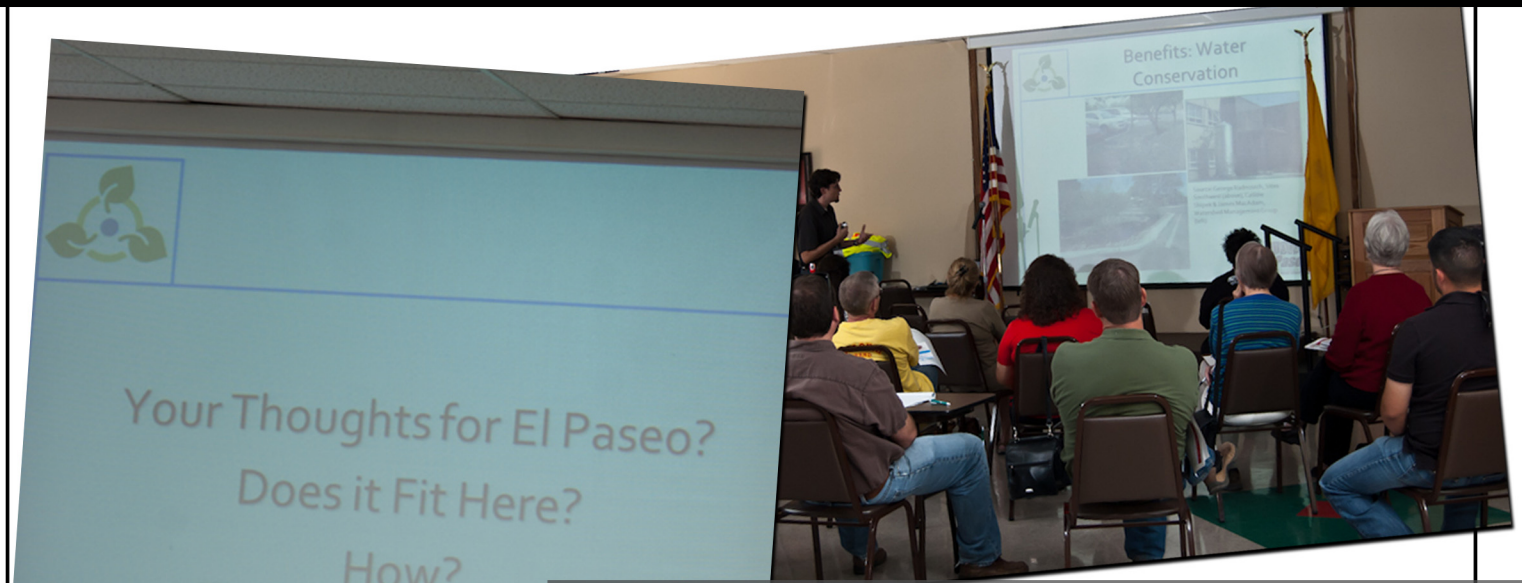
sharing your vision for the corridor



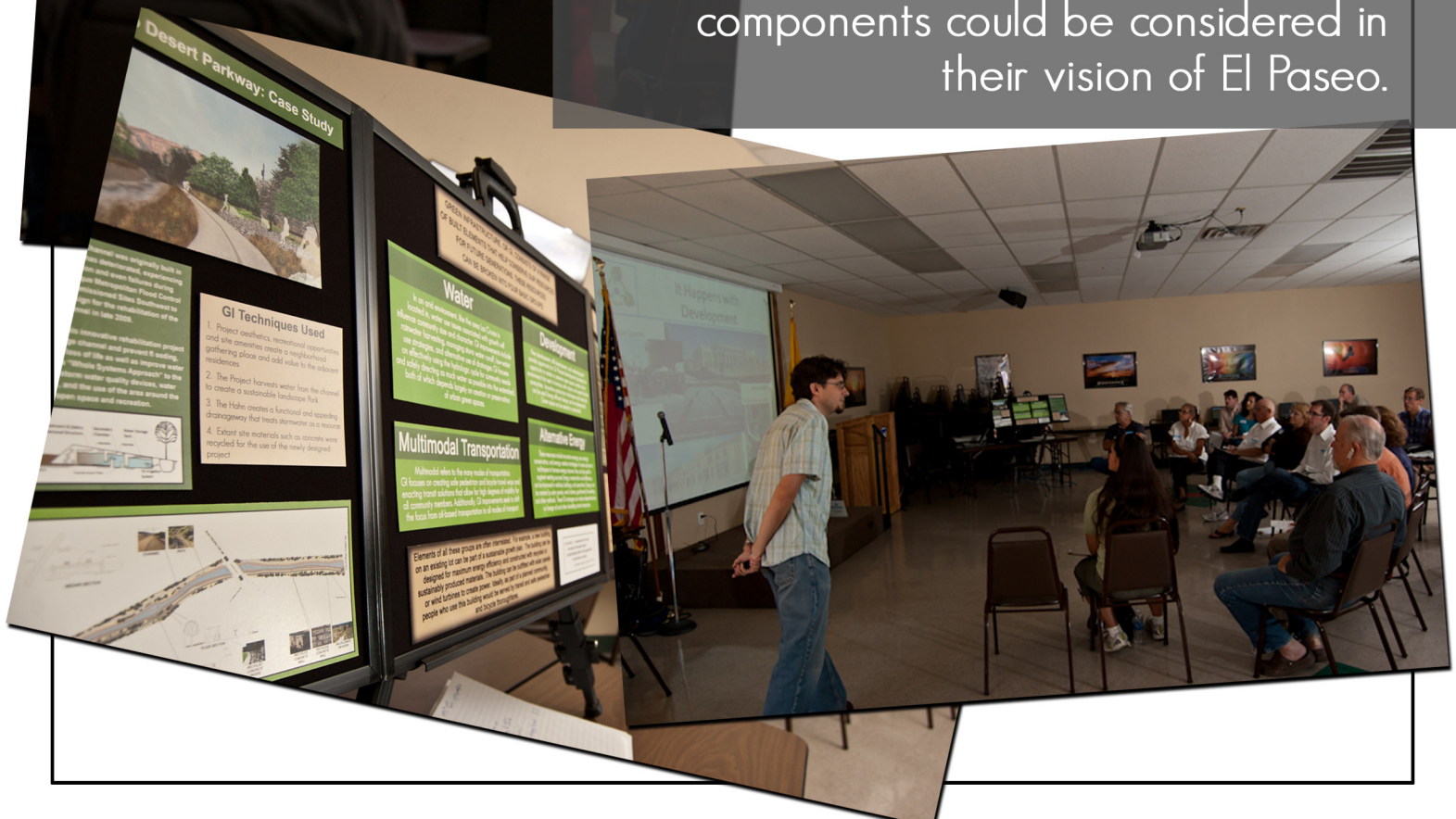
The first Picturing El Paseo Visioning Workshop was held October 1st and 2nd, 2010. The two-day workshop series featured four structured workshop sessions attended by representatives of the community and community organizations. The focus of this workshop was to introduce and test public involvement techniques to involve local residents, students, businesses, and organizations in the Picturing El Paseo project in preparation for a larger public workshop in November.



Green Infrastructure



The Visioning Workshop began with a brief presentation on green infrastructure to give all participants ideas about how water conservation, heat island effect mitigation, and other green infrastructure components could be considered in their vision of El Paseo.



Visual Preference Survey

More green infrastructure information was made available on display boards, and attendees took a visual preference survey to determine what kind of landscaping is appropriate for the El Paseo Corridor.



Mapping



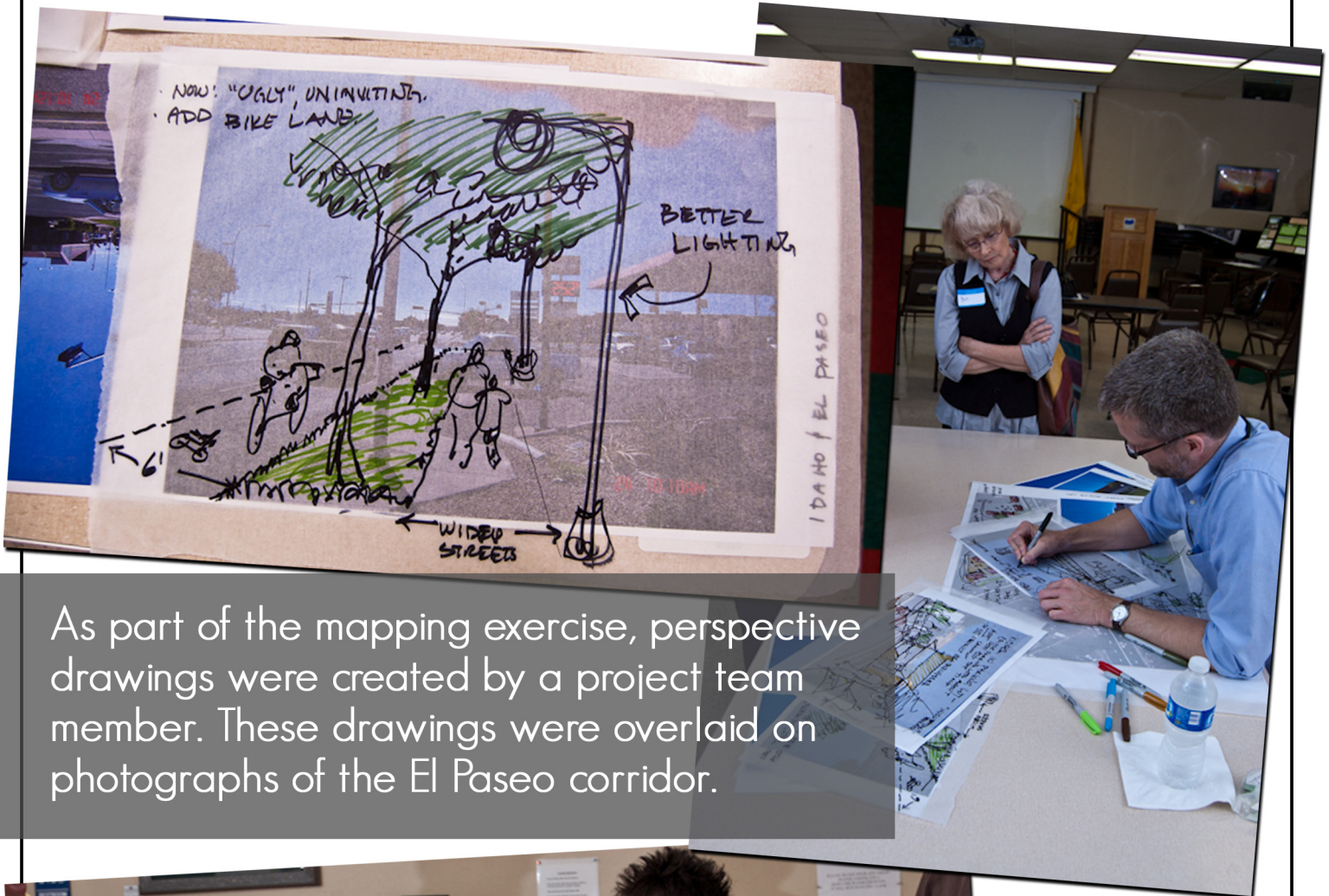
People were encouraged to write and draw on maps of the corridor area to spark problem-solving thought processes and generate ideas through discussion.



Results of these mapping sessions can help focus the Picturing El Paseo vision within the corridor or shape how the vision is carried out.



Shared Perspectives



As part of the mapping exercise, perspective drawings were created by a project team member. These drawings were overlaid on photographs of the El Paseo corridor.

The perspective drawings helped participants see a possible outcome of their visioning ideas. These visual exercises will be further explored as Picturing El Paseo moves forward.

Site Tour



Each workshop session provided the opportunity for people to visit the El Paseo Road and Idaho Avenue intersection. Participants who wanted to get the feel for the walkability of the roadway were encouraged to safely walk along and across the street and record their feelings of comfort and safety.

Feedback Session



Picturing el Paseo

We would like to see more...

And less...

Our community working Vision Statement foresees...
A future El Paseo that is landscaped with native plants to increase aesthetics and create shade to make inviting urban space. This urban space is designed to be accessible to pedestrians, bicycles, and transit, while remaining thoughtful to vehicles. An emphasis should be placed on keeping natural views and beautifying the built environment by fixing sidewalks, planting medians, and screening dumpsters. Vacant buildings should be repurposed and new buildings should be constructed in a modern style or Mission Revival style. Safety, recreational opportunities, and healthy living choices should be enhanced when possible.

City of Las Cruces
Proudly Building People

www.picturingelpaseo.org

Each session included a feedback session, which was recorded for further, more detailed study. Participants learned about the Picturing El Paseo Photovoice exercise and were encouraged to give feedback about how photos can be used to create a community-based snapshot of the El Paseo corridor to effectively guide decision makers and redevelopment. This feedback is currently being used to refine public involvement techniques as Picturing El Paseo moves forward.

EVALUATION WORKSHEET

Project Name:

Public involvement goals:

Did the plans meet the goals? Yes No

Please explain how:

Expected outcomes:

Did the project meet outcomes? Yes No

Please explain how:

What lessons learned can be used on future projects?

NEW TOOL WORKSHEET

Tool Name: _____

Tool overview and application:

Comment gathering:

Key points for using this tool:

Tool benefits:

Project(s) where tool has been used:
