

# CITY OF ESPAÑOLA

# ACTION PLAN FOR REVITALIZATION

North Railroad Area Plume Superfund Site

December 2022

## INTRODUCTION

The City of Española, New Mexico has a vision to transform their Town Center into a thriving commercial and cultural hub that leverages regional tourism to boost the local economy and increase quality of life. To support this vision, the Superfund Redevelopment Program facilitated a reuse planning process that brought together local, regional, state and federal partners to share potential resources and strategies to support the city of Española's revitalization initiatives. This action plan documents the city's revitalization goals, along with the needs, opportunities, next steps and resources, to serve as a roadmap for public and private investment.

## BACKGROUND

The city of Española has invested in several planning initiatives to revitalize the three-block Town Center, including a Master Plan in 2007, a Comprehensive Plan update in 2017, and a concept plan for the Hunter Arts and Agricultural Complex in 2017. To move these plans into action, the city intends to pursue technical assistance from the New Mexico Mainstreet Program to develop an investment strategy and refined plaza plan that focuses on the history of the tri-cultures of the valley (Pueblo, Spanish and Anglo). In addition, the New Mexico Department of Transportation is planning intersection improvements in 2023 that will greatly improve visibility, traffic flow and pedestrian safety.

The Town Center has faced several challenges to revitalization. This area is separated from much of the commercial area along Highway 68 by the Rio Grande River and the Santa Clara Pueblo Tribal Lands along the river corridor. This area also includes several contaminated properties in various stages of cleanup. The Superfund Redevelopment Program has provided assistance to help identify the barriers to the city's revitalization goals and bring together resource partners to help address those challenges.

## PROCESS

In early 2022, EPA developed a reuse situation assessment for the city to document future use goals and potential barriers to redevelopment in the Town Center, which encompasses area above and near the North Railroad Avenue Plume (NRPA) site. EPA then conducted a site visit to Española on March 10, 2022 to share the situation assessment with city and state environmental agency representatives. As an outcome of the situation assessment meeting, participants agreed to host a working session with a broader group of stakeholders and resource partners on June 29, 2022. This report documents the outcomes of this process and recommended actions.



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# ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

The Town Center includes several contaminated properties in various stages of cleanup. These sites are within the exterior boundaries of the Santa Clara Pueblo.

## NORTH RAILROAD AVENUE PLUME SITE

The Town Center is located near the North Railroad Avenue Plume (NRAP), a Superfund site currently undergoing cleanup. The NRAP site was created by the Norge Town dry-cleaning facility, located at 162 North Railroad Avenue, which leaked contaminants (including tetrachloroethylene (PCE) and trichloroethylene (TCE)) into the groundwater. The NRAP site was placed on the Superfund National Priorities List in January 1999. The New Mexico Environment Department is the lead agency with EPA oversight. In 2001, EPA selected a cleanup plan of in-place soil and groundwater treatment (bioremediation) at the source area and hot-spot area, along with in-place treatment (bioremediation) of the Shallow Plume and four Deep Zone Plumes. Monitoring wells and remediation wells are located throughout the plume area.

Five-Year Reviews are performed to assess remedy protectiveness. The 2020 review found the remedy to be protective in the short-term with no known exposure to site contaminants. Over 90 percent of the shallow plume is cleaned up. For long-term protectiveness, the cleanup plan includes an enhanced treatment strategy for the Deep Zone and Source Area with improved organic amendments, additional injection wells and continued groundwater monitoring.

**Overall, the Superfund site is not posing a barrier to redevelopment.** Vapor intrusion monitoring is ongoing for structures located adjacent to and immediately southeast of the former dry-cleaning building. Groundwater use is restricted within the overall footprint of the groundwater contaminant plume. Injection and monitoring wells are located throughout these plume areas.

## CALLE CHAVEZ PLUME

The State of New Mexico is managing cleanup for a second groundwater contamination plume from D&D Mountain Air Cleaners, located at 309 South Paseo de Oñate. The plume consists of volatile organic compounds, including Tetrachloroethene (PCE), which is a commonly used solvent in dry-cleaning operations. In July 2022, the responsible party completed a site investigation report that delineated an initial plume extent. The state is requiring the responsible party to perform additional site characterization to identify potential site remediation activities.

## HUNTER FORD BROWNFIELD PROPERTY

The city owns the Hunter Ford property, which has potential for soil vapor intrusion into buildings (not related to NRAP site) and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in exterior paint on the building. The city is not eligible to access EPA or state Brownfield funds for the Hunter Ford brownfield site because they acquired the site without conducting timely due diligence. However, a future owner could be eligible for Brownfield assessment and cleanup funding if they conduct their due diligence before acquisition. The cleanup is not expected to be cost-prohibitive.

EPA's Brownfield Program conducted a Phase II environmental site assessment in 2016 and it is available upon request from EPA.

### EPA's Superfund Redevelopment Program (SRP)

EPA's responsibility is to ensure protection of human health and the environment. To preserve options for anticipated land use, EPA considers current and future land use during the cleanup decision process to the extent feasible.

EPA's SRP support helps:

- Bring stakeholders to the table.
- Understand community land use goals.
- Clarify cleanup goals, process and constraints.
- Integrate land use goals into the cleanup process as feasible.
- Identify long-term stewardship options.



# COMMUNITY CONTEXT

## OVERVIEW

### OWNERSHIP

The city owns property within the three-block town center focus area. There is other city-owned land nearby, as well as public schools and county and state lands. Santa Clara Pueblo Tribal Lands are located along the Rio Grande River, and the Pueblo also owns some key roads throughout the city.

### LAND USE CONTEXT

The Town Center is located in the Westside neighborhood, which is partially disconnected from the larger eastern side of the city by the Rio Grande River. There is a mix of commercial, residential and institutional uses with an historic district overlay.

The Town Center is located at the “Y” of two regional thoroughfares, US 84 and 285. The New Mexico Department of Transportation is planning a realignment of this intersection in 2023 that will result in traffic and safety pedestrian improvements.



Map of Town Center Location

## CITY GOALS

The city’s goals for the Westside neighborhood include:



**TOURISM** - Leverage proximity to regional tourism destinations (natural and cultural) to boost the local economy.



**TOWN CENTER** - Revitalize downtown main street area into a thriving commercial and cultural center.



**HOUSING** - Address housing shortage through infill and vacant lot development.

The following sections explores each of these goals in more detail, outlining needs, related initiatives and opportunities.



# TOURISM



## ASSETS

Española is centrally located at the heart of the Española Valley, which offers abundant, year-round cultural and natural destinations. At the crossroads of Highways 285 and 30, Española is only five miles from a regional airport. On the way to ski resorts, the Puye Cliff Dwellings, Bandelier National Monument, and the treasured cities of Taos and Sante Fe, Española is primed to offer a stop-over for visitors to rest, sample local beer and foods, and enjoy the region's arts and cultural heritage. Complimenting the regional destinations, Española offers many undiscovered gems, including the Fiber Arts Center, weaving shops, historical sites, a local farmers market and murals.

The city is pursuing an economic development strategy centered on tourism that leverages Española as a hidden gem in the valley. The city also has funding to develop a visitor website that connects to other regional tourism websites. City leadership is looking for partners to help place Española on the regional tourism map and to attract the many visitors passing through to other destinations.



The City has a rich collection of murals.

## GOAL

**Leverage proximity to regional tourism destinations (natural and cultural) to boost the local economy.**

## NEEDS

The city aims to capitalize on its strategic location as the "heart" of the valley, a hidden gem within the larger Española Valley.



### Investment Strategy

Strategies to attract visitors from highways into new Town Center



### Regional Network

Tourism partners to help place Española on the regional tourism map



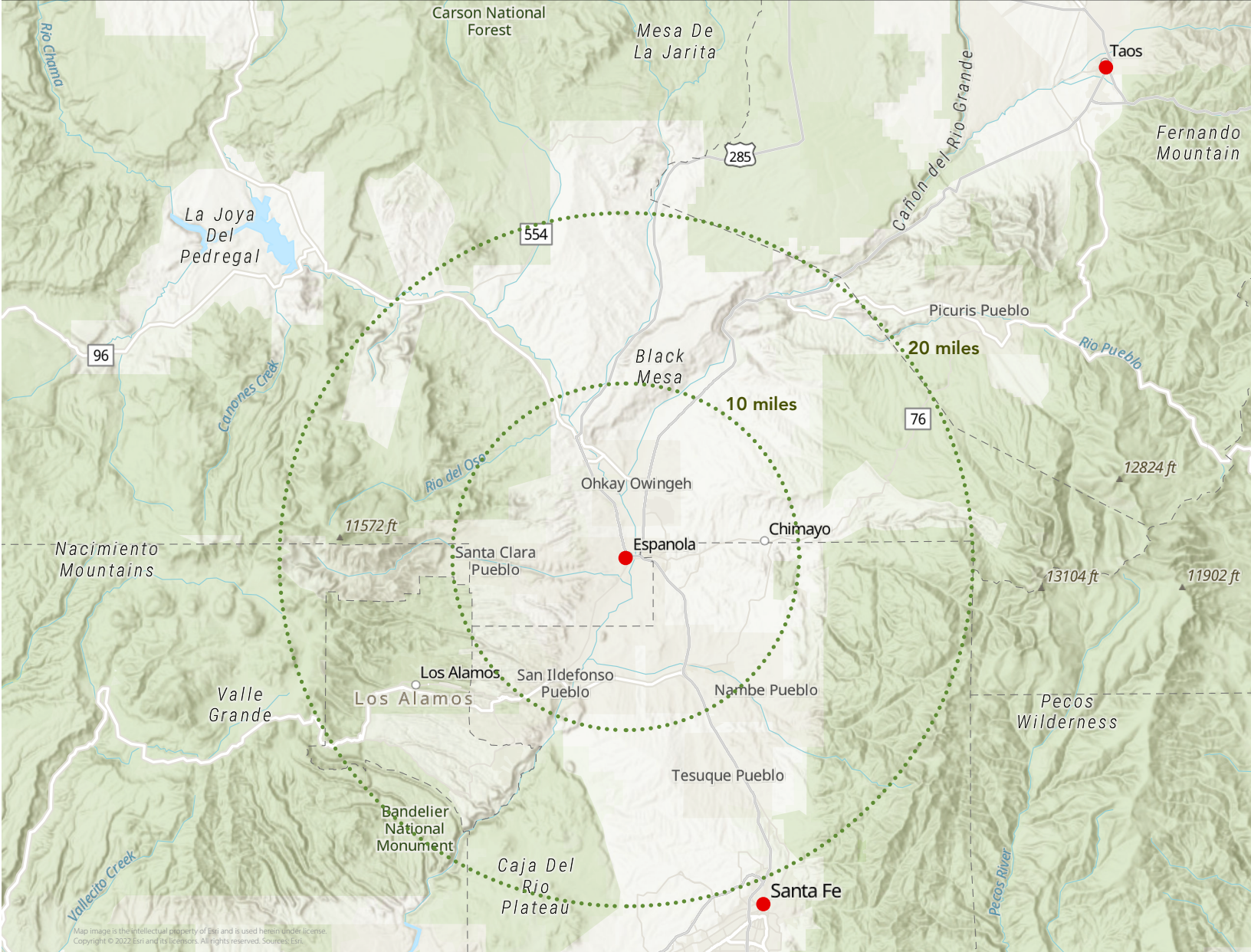
### Tourism Signage

Signs highlighting where to find food, rest areas and cultural heritage sites

## CURRENT INITIATIVES

To promote tourism, the city is pursuing an economic development strategy that leverages the region's natural and cultural assets.

The city is developing a visitor website that connects to other regional tourism websites.



## OPPORTUNITIES

- New Mexico True offers grants, toolkits and publications to promote regional tourism. <https://www.newmexico.org/industry/>
- New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division offers funding to support projects that enhance community outdoor recreation opportunities, such as trails, river parks and wildlife viewing areas, as well as support for outdoor recreation startups in service, retail and manufacturing. <https://www.nmoutside.com/>
- New Mexico Northern Pueblos Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) provides technical assistance and funding for transportation projects including: environmental and other studies; planning; design; construction; and acquisition of rights of way necessary for the development of transportation infrastructure. <https://www.rtpnm.org/northern-pueblos>
- New Mexico Historic Preservation Division periodically offers preservation grants for National Register nominations, outreach, conditions assessments or to lay the groundwork for a major preservation project. <https://www.nmhistoricpreservation.org/>

According to the 2019 Economic Impact of Visitors in New Mexico report, visitors to New Mexico spent \$7.4 billion in 2019, which generated \$10.4 billion in total business sales and sustained a total of 96,064 jobs.



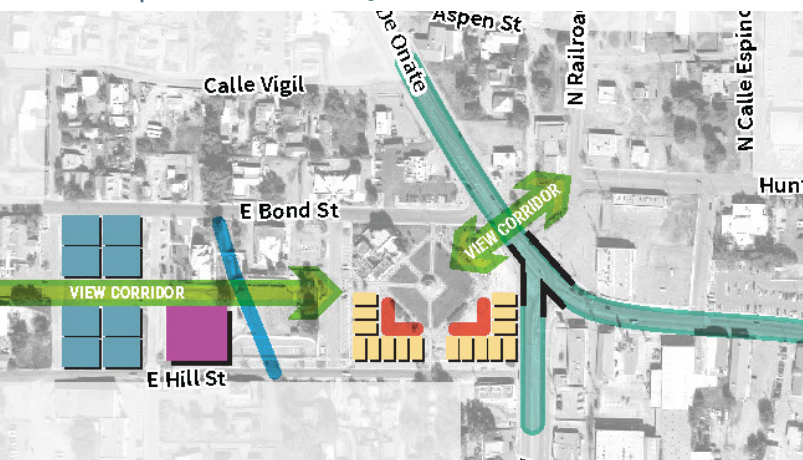
# TOWN CENTER



## ASSETS

Española’s Town Center is strategically located at the juncture of Highway 285, leading north to Taos, and Highway 30, leading southwest to Bandelier National Monument and Los Alamos. The Town Center currently includes the Plaza de Española, which houses the Chamber of Commerce, the Visitor Center and the Northern New Mexico Regional Art Center, along with residential services. The plaza also includes a veteran’s memorial, a museum and stunning views of the valley. The city of Española envisions adding rest area amenities, a cultural gathering place and a local food market to attract both visitors and residents.

The state will soon complete a road alignment that will better orient visitors to the plaza and include pedestrian safety features connecting the plaza to the Hunter Ford property to the east. Plans exist to convert the Hunter Ford property to an Arts and Agricultural Complex that supports local entrepreneurs celebrating the arts and crafts of the region. Building on public investment to date, city leadership is eager to work with landowners, private investors and public resources agencies to realize this vision on behalf of the Española community.



## GOAL

**Revitalize downtown main street area into a thriving commercial and cultural center.**

## NEEDS

The city is focused on revitalizing the city-owned, three-block area encompassing the Española Plaza and the adjacent brownfield site (Hunter Ford property).



### Development Strategy

Third party assessment and development of Hunter Ford property



### Tourist Amenities

Rest area and amenities to attract visitors and regional tourists



### Cultural Amenities

Showcase for the rich local arts and crafts of the region



### Local Market or Grocery Store

Meeting the demand for selling and buying local produce, crafts, and other goods.

*Town Center vision from the City’s 2017 Comprehensive Plan.*

# *The City is well-positioned to leverage existing planning efforts to pursue grants and attract investment and development in the Town Center.*

## **CURRENT INITIATIVES**

The city is pursuing technical assistance from the New Mexico Mainstreet Program to develop an investment plan that will include a refined plaza plan with community involvement and that focuses on the history of the tri-cultures of the Española valley (Pueblo, Spanish and Anglo).

An anticipated city zoning update may include overlay zones to support revitalization goals.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) intersection improvements planned for 2023 will include pedestrian safety improvements that will help integrate this three-block zone across Paseo De Onate.

The city has existing concept plans for the Hunter property and the plaza as a foundation for public and private investment.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

- While the city is not eligible to access EPA or state Brownfield funds for the Hunter Ford brownfield site, a future owner could be eligible for Brownfield assessment funding if they conducted due diligence before purchasing the property and are eligible.
- City leadership is eager to attract investors and engage local landowners in the vision of downtown.
- The city may be able to pitch their Hunter Arts and Agricultural Complex to "FUNDIT," a program of the NM Economic Development Department that brings together a range of state and federal resources.
- The city may be able to explore economic development finance avenues, such as a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district, federal and state tax credits, revolving loan funds, and bonding.
- The Progress Through Partnering Fund may be an opportunity to support Española's revitalization goals. The fund was initiated by Los Alamos County to distribute the increased income from gross receipts tax generated by Los Alamos National Laboratory.
- The New Mexico Oil & Gas Association (NMOGA) is a coalition of oil and natural gas companies and these companies are often looking for civic investment opportunities. With numerous active oil and gas wells in the surrounding area, the city in coordination with Rio Arriba County could explore local investment opportunities with NMOGA.

### **CASE STUDY: MADISON PUBLIC MARKET**

The city of Madison teamed with a philanthropic foundation to transform a city-owned parking area into a hub for community-based entrepreneurship and destination for culturally diverse, locally produced food. The MarketReady program supported 30 local food entrepreneurs through training and startup capital to launch their new businesses.

<http://madisonpublicmarket.org/merchants/market-ready-program/>



# HOUSING



## ASSETS

Lack of quality housing is one of the city of Española's biggest challenges. Española envisions investing in a range of housing types including rental, live-work, transitional and medium-income housing. Housing is grandfathered into commercial zoning. This has led to the conversion of residential to commercial uses, which are not always compatible with surrounding uses.

The city does not currently have the capacity or resources to condemn properties and remove blighted structures. However, the city and county own property close to the Town Center that could be used for housing close to schools and transportation.

In addition, Española is located about 25 minutes from Los Alamos, which houses the federal Los Alamos National Lab. The city of Los Alamos is fully developed and looking to expand housing options. Over the next five years, Los Alamos National Lab anticipates hiring 1,500 to 2,000 employees for a variety of jobs.



View from City Plaza.

## GOAL

**Address housing shortage through infill and vacant lot development.**

## NEEDS

The city is focused on creating a range of housing options around the Town Center to serve residents and the Los Alamos National Lab workforce.



### Housing Stock

Housing to meet a range of local and regional needs



### Land Bank and/or Land Trust

Program to acquire and transform abandoned properties and blighted structures into quality housing



### Zoning Updates

Zoning updates to support housing projection and development

## CURRENT INITIATIVES

The city has 2020 housing data and a housing assessment underway.

The city is also planning a zoning update that could protect and expand options for residential use.



*The Town Center can host an urban village with a range of quality housing options to serve residents and the Los Alamos National Lab workforce.*

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Creating a land bank authority could be a tool to acquire, stabilize and redevelop abandoned properties through a separate development authority.
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has a range of funding programs including the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), which can address needs such as infrastructure, economic development projects, public facilities installation, community centers, housing rehabilitation, public services, clearance/acquisition, microenterprise assistance, code enforcement and homeowner assistance.
- The HUD Home Investment Partnerships (HOME) program provides grants to state and local governments to create affordable housing for low-income households and to fund a wide range of activities, including constructing, acquiring, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income households.
- The county was recently awarded a \$100,000 planning grant through the U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) to plan for housing.

## CASE STUDY: URBAN VILLAGE HOUSING REVITALIZES ALBUQUERQUE'S INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT

In 2017, the affordable housing development Casa Feliz opened with 89 units in Albuquerque's Trumbull neighborhood, offering a range of studios and multi-bedroom units. Developed by the local nonprofit Greater Albuquerque Housing Partnership (GAHP), the project was designed as an urban village to fill in vacant and blighted lots around Plaza Feliz and to revitalize the culturally and historically significant neighborhood. The completed development consists of 12 two-story buildings in a Southwest style, decorated with art based on New Mexico's native plants and animals. Each ground-floor unit has a front porch and an individual entryway facing the street to enhance security with "eyes on the street." The development is certified by the U.S. Green Building Council as LEED Home Platinum with sustainable materials, fixtures and appliances, along with plantings that minimize solar heating during summer.

The residential units are interspersed with four small plazas that feature a sports field, a children's playground, garden seating and an edible garden to promote neighbor interaction and safe play spaces. Casa Feliz also has a large community building that includes a computer room, a kitchen and a multipurpose room as well as a social services manager who coordinates services, such as medical checkups, General Equivalency Development classes, budgeting workshops, résumé-building classes and daycare.

The development was funded primarily through \$12.53 million in equity from the sale of low-income housing tax credits, along with local redevelopment funds from the city of Albuquerque and a loan from the New Mexico Housing Trust Fund.

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-inpractice-100918.html>

# ACTION STEPS



The city of Española has several initiatives underway that will soon result in specific funding priorities for housing and revitalization. The city is well positioned to engage both public and private partners during these initiatives to set the stage for implementation funding. Key actions steps are outlined below:

- 1 Enlist New Mexico True in supporting tourism strategies through grants, toolkits and publications.  
<https://www.newmexico.org/industry/>
- 2 Engage state funding partners during the Main Street initiative to identify specific near-term projects that can celebrate the local culture, provide resident and visitor amenities, and improve local infrastructure. Partners to engage include:
  - New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division offers funding to support projects that enhance community outdoor recreation opportunities such as trails, river parks and wildlife viewing areas, as well as support to help outdoor recreation startups in service, retail and manufacturing.  
<https://www.nmoutside.com/>
  - New Mexico Northern Pueblos Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) provides technical assistance and funding for transportation projects including: (1) environmental and other studies; (2) planning; (3) design; (4) construction; and (5) acquisition of rights-of-way necessary for the development of transportation infrastructure, such as highways, streets, roadways, bridges, crossing structures, parking facilities, and areas for vehicular, transit, bicycle or pedestrian use.
- 3 Engage state partners during the city's housing assessment and zoning update to position Española for HUD resources to increase quality housing options for Española, Los Alamos and the surrounding region. Resources to consider include:
  - HUD CDBG can address needs such as infrastructure, economic development projects, public facilities installation, community centers, housing rehabilitation, public services, clearance/acquisition, microenterprise assistance, code enforcement and homeowner assistance.
  - The HUD HOME program provides grants to state and local governments to create affordable housing for low-income households and funds a wide range of activities, including constructing, acquiring, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income households.
- 4 Contact the New Mexico Economic Development Department to present the Hunter Arts and Agricultural Complex to "FUNDIT," a program that brings together a range of state and federal resources.
- 5 Enlist Los Alamos National Lab in planning efforts for Main Street and Hunter Ford to plan for expansion and housing.



# TOOLS

## ENVIRONMENTAL LIABILITY PROTECTIONS

EPA works with prospective purchasers, local government entities involved in property acquisition and interested developers to ensure interested parties are aware of the steps needed to manage environmental liability issues. Property acquisition and future development should be coordinated closely with EPA Region 6 and NMED to ensure consistency with the site's clean-up and operation and maintenance. The 2002 Brownfield Amendments to the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) provides important protections that could apply to prospective purchasers of parcels within the site. Prospective purchasers who meet certain statutory criteria and comply with ongoing obligations can qualify for liability protections. EPA can provide additional information to interested parties.

## SUPERFUND READY FOR REUSE (RFR) DETERMINATIONS

To support redevelopment within the North Avenue Railroad Plume site, EPA can develop an environmental status report called a Ready for Reuse Determination that provides a technical determination that a site is "ready for reuse" and will remain protective for that use, so long as any use limitations established by EPA continue to be met. This document can be helpful in real estate sales and loans to assure lenders and buyers that the site is safe for reuse.

For more information, see <https://www.epa.gov/superfund-redevelopment/ready-reuse-rfr-determinations-superfund-sites>.



## LAND BANKS AND COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

Land banks and community land trusts are different entities with different purposes and powers that can be complements to each other to achieve community goals.

Land banks are governmental entities or public non-profit corporations that are focused on the conversion of vacant, abandoned and tax-delinquent properties into productive reuse. Land banks are granted special real estate powers and legal authority pursuant to state-enabling statutes to allow them to acquire title, eliminate liabilities, and transfer the properties to new, responsible owners in a transparent manner that results in outcomes consistent with community-based plans.

Community land trusts are traditionally private nonprofits that hold land in trust to provide affordable housing and other community assets in perpetuity. Land trusts are typically involved later in the process.

In 2018, the Center for Community Progress assisted the City of Albuquerque evaluate the feasibility of land banking as a tool to address vacant, abandoned, and substandard properties. The report could be valuable for the City of Española and is available here: <https://communityprogress.org/publications/land-banking-in-albuquerque/>.

# MOVING FORWARD

The following agencies and organizations have been identified as potential partners with programs, resources or tools that may help advance the city's revitalization goals.

Name	Organization	Contact	Program Information
Casey Luckett Snyder	EPA Region 6, Superfund Redevelopment Coordinator	luckett.casey@epa.gov (214) 665-7393	Assists communities with redevelopment tools such as reuse planning, comfort letters, and liability protections.
Andrew Portalatin	EPA Region 6, Brownfields and Land Revitalization	portalatin.Andrew@epa.gov	Provides grants and technical assistance to assess, safely clean up and sustainably reuse contaminated properties.
Donnie Quintana, Director	New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration (DFA)	Donnie.Quintana@state.nm.us <a href="http://www.nmdfa.state.nm.us/local-government/">www.nmdfa.state.nm.us/local-government/</a>	Funding from HUD's CDBG program is managed by the state.
Shanna Sasser, New Mexico Rural Ombudsman	New Mexico DFA	shanna.sasser@state.nm.us	Fosters partnerships to help address the challenges and optimizing the opportunities for rural communities.
Stephanie Herrera	HUD Community Planning and Development	Stephanie.M.Herrera@hud.gov	
Peter Mitchell, North Central Representative	FUNDIT (New Mexico Economic Development Department)	Peter.Mitchell@state.nm.us <a href="http://www.nmfundit.org/">www.nmfundit.org/</a>	FUNDIT is an alliance of public/private organizations working to increase funding and leverage finance opportunities.
David Trujillo, Government Affairs Representative	Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL)	dftrujillo@lanl.gov	There is an opportunity to coordinate shared goals between City and LANL.
Chantal Orio, Grants Coordinator	New Mexico True	chantal.orio@state.nm.us <a href="http://www.newmexico.org/industry/">www.newmexico.org/industry/</a>	Offers grants, toolkits and publications to promote regional tourism.
Alexandra Navas, Director	New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division	Alexandra.Navas@state.nm.us <a href="http://www.nmoutside.com/">www.nmoutside.com/</a>	Offers funding to support projects that enhance community outdoor recreation opportunities.
Alison Gillette	North Central New Mexico Economic Development District	alisong@ncnmedd.com <a href="https://www.ncnmedd.com/">https://www.ncnmedd.com/</a>	Assists local governments with community and economic development projects and initiatives.
Paul Sittig, NCNMEDD Transportation Planner	New Mexico Northern Pueblos Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO)	pauls@ncnmedd.com (505) 356-9694	RTPO provides technical assistance and funding for transportation projects.
Amber Leichtle	Rio Arriba Department of Health and Human Services	aleichtle@rio-arriba.org	Managing planning grant from the U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration for housing plan.



*In remembrance of City of Española Planning Director, Muhammad A. Hussain, and the vision and contributions that he provided for this planning effort and Clarissa Duran for her instrumental community organizing early in Española's revitalization efforts.*

## TECHNICAL CONTACTS

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