

Mountainair Metropolitan Redevelopment Area Designation Report



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Town of Mountainair, New Mexico

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INTRODUCTION

The Town of Mountainair is a small rural town located in Tarrant County approximately 10 miles from the geographic center of New Mexico, and approximately 75 miles southeast of Albuquerque. At an elevation of 6,495 feet, the climate is high and dry with an average annual precipitation of 14.4 inches.

Mountainair was incorporated in 1903. It was established in anticipation of the first trains passing from Belen to Amarillo Texas in 1907. Trains were a large part of the area economy, along with agriculture and ranching. At one point Mountainair was the “Pinto Bean Capitol of the World” and had hundreds of employees. The industry ended in Mountainair after a drought from 1946 to 1950. The railroad and associated activity has been significantly reduced in Mountainair since the late 1960s, although Mountainair maintains its position along a major BNSF railway corridor. Since then the main industry has been ranching, with trade and tourism also contributing to the local economy.

Today many people choose to live in Mountainair because of its rural character and its small town atmosphere. It has a population of just over 1,100 people and covers approximately 1.6 square miles laid out in a gridded pattern of blocks and streets. The commercial area is centered on the crossroads of U.S. Highway 60 and State Highway 55 and is home to the Salina Pueblo Missions National Monument Visitor Center which annually draws almost 30,000 visitors. Nearby recreational opportunities include Manzano State Park, Cibola National Forest, and the historic sites of Quarai, Abó and Gran Quivira which make up Salinas Pueblo Mission National Monument.

Stagnant population, lower median incomes and numerous vacant and underutilized properties within the town center are indicators of the slow economic decline of the Town as a whole and the need to reverse physical and economic conditions that are unfavorable to the social and economic well-being of the residents of the Town.

One tool to help Mountainair actively work to improve the economic and physical conditions in the town center is the designation of a Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA). The proposed MRA, which includes the intersection of State Highway 55 and U.S. Highway 60 and surrounding areas, is one of the prime areas in the Town that can be used to achieve the goals of diversifying the local economy, pursuing tourism development opportunities and encouraging the growth of the small business sector.

The Town of Mountainair Comprehensive Land Use Plan of 2004 includes policies which support the designation of a MRA to improve economic and physical conditions in the Town. These include encouraging restoration or redevelopment of abandoned properties and diversifying the local economic base.

This report demonstrates the existing conditions within Mountainair’s town center meet the criteria for the “blighted” area designation as defined by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Code (3- 60A-8). Physical conditions of the town center and economic conditions expressed by business activity and the demographics of the population all point to the need for Mountainair to pursue alleviating the conditions of blight and implement revitalization efforts.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MOUNTAINAIR

Source: Mountainair Chamber of Commerce http://discovermountainairnm.com/?page_id=29

The history of Mountainair and the surrounding area merges with its present-day description, offering a Gateway to Ancient Cities.

Hundreds of years ago Abó had an abundance of water, creating a sustainable farming community that historians estimate may have reached 20,000 native inhabitants. A Pueblo (Tompito) petroglyph at Abó, dated from the 1400's depicts Tawa, the Sun-Father, one of the most revered deities of the Pueblo Indians and a key element for a bountiful harvest. Abó is positioned on a major east-west trade route the Abó Pass, a shallow gap that divides the Manzano and Los Piños Mountains. The community of Abó was still thriving when Spanish explorers came upon it in 1561. Abó was the head of one of the largest missionary operations in New Mexico, known today as the part of the National Monument Salinas Pueblo Missions. The three sites that comprise these ruins—Abó, Quarai and Gran Quivira—attract historians, archeologists, and visitors to Mountainair from all over the world.

Among the intriguing aspects of Mountainair are residents who can still tell the story of when their Grandparents called an area within the town, Monte Alto. However difficult it may be to locate historic documents verifying these tales, one can only imagine a small village of settlers, unaware of the attention they were about to receive.

The attention arrived with the railroad and the founding of Mountainair by John Corbett, Colonel E.C. Manning, and former U.S. Governor E. S. Stover in the summer of 1903. It was the first incorporated town in the area—before Tarrant was a county and before New Mexico officially became a state. Strategically sited for the railroad at the summit of Abó Pass and named for its cool fresh mountain breezes, passengers first rolled into Mountainair in 1907 and continued to travel through during the 1960's. This alternate route, now primarily used for freight, known as the Belen cut-off, is part of the transcontinental tracks. It was built in some measure to alleviate the extreme grades and delays over Raton and the Glorietta passes. The depot, currently owned by BNSF, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the early 1900's, with rain in abundance, farming again played an important role in the area's history, fostering a boom in the economy and increasing the population to nearly 5,000. This entitled Mountainair to become the "The Pinto Bean Capital of the World," housing the nation's largest bean processing center, with peak production reaching over 750 train carloads of beans in one season. Pinto beans, a sturdy crop, provided American soldiers their main rations through WWII. The beans were farmed on approximately 40,000 acres, using the rain as their principal source of water. In 1946 a 10-year drought began, leaving the land barren and forcing farmers to become ranchers or move to make a better living. With ranching now a mainstay in Tarrant County and with a population today hovering at 2,000+ in Mountainair, there are likely more cattle than people living around the town.

In the mid 1980's a resurgence of relocation to Mountainair took place and continues to this day, with numerous new or renovated homes and businesses in Mountainair and several innovative sub-divisions surrounding the town. This long and diverse history of Mountainair, in addition to the breathtaking

views of the Chupadera Mesa and the Manzano Mountains, has a mystique that captures the imagination of writers, artists, photographers, and individuals searching for a unique and wondrous place. A little over an hour from Albuquerque, Mountainair, Gateway to Ancient Cities, offers an adventure into times past, enjoyment to its visitors, and endearment to its residents.



MRA DESIGNATION

A visual and economic survey of the Town found the Town center exhibits physical and economic conditions that are unfavorable to the social and economic well-being of the residents of the community. Within the proposed MRA boundary there are a significant number of structures which are vacant or underutilized. Evidence of neglect of these structures in the area is recurrent. Additionally, three structures with businesses were burned in December, 2016, creating a loss of revenue and housing. Economically, the Town as a whole has improved in its wages over the past 15 years, but the area of the MRA has steadily declined in businesses and employment, placing it below the Town and the state average.

The New Mexico Metropolitan Redevelopment Code (3-60A-1 to 3-60A-48 NMSA 1978) provides cities in New Mexico with the powers to correct conditions in areas or neighborhoods within municipalities which “substantially inflict or arrest the sound and orderly development” within the town. These powers can help reverse an area’s decline and stagnation; however, the Town may only use these powers within a designated Metropolitan Redevelopment Area.

Designation of an MRA is based on findings of “blight” conditions, as defined in the Metropolitan Redevelopment Code (3-60S-8). The criteria set by the Code for a “blighted” area include physical conditions and economic conditions. As defined in the Code, "Blighted area" means an area within the area of operation that, because of the presence of a substantial number of deteriorated or deteriorating structures, predominance of defective or inadequate street layout, faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility or usefulness, unsanitary or unsafe conditions, deterioration of site or other improvements, diversity of ownership, tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land, defective or unusual conditions of title, improper subdivision or lack of adequate housing facilities in the area or obsolete or impractical planning and platting or an area where a significant number of commercial or mercantile businesses have closed or significantly reduced their operations due to the economic losses or loss of profit due to operating in the area, low levels of commercial or industrial activity or redevelopment or any combination of such factors, substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth and economic health and well-being of a municipality or locale within a municipality or an area that retards the provisions of housing accommodations or constitutes an economic or social burden and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals or welfare in its present condition and use.

MRA PLAN BOUNDARY

The boundary of the Mountainair Metropolitan Redevelopment Area centers on Broadway Boulevard, Summit Avenue and the surrounding areas:

- From the intersection of Highway 60/Broadway and 3rd Street go north along 60 to Sunset Avenue.
- Go north on Sunset to Beal Street.
- Follow east along Beal to Railroad Avenue, then south to Highway 60/Broadway.
- From the intersection of Broadway and Railroad, the line continues east along Broadway to a point between Railroad and Dunn, where it turns south along the access drive to the rail service yard and continues to the railroad track.
- At the railroad track, the line continues southwest along the rail line to the 3rd Street alignment.
- Continuing west along the 3rd Street alignment, the line returns to the point of origin at Highway 60/Broadway and 3rd.



EXISTING PHYSICAL CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

The following sections identify the physical and the economic conditions of the area that warrant designation of this area as a Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA).

Building Conditions

Buildings range from good condition to deteriorating and dilapidated. Some of these structures are occupied, while others are vacant and in some cases, threatened by “demolition by neglect



Vacant and Underutilized Properties

Many commercial businesses and community facilities inside the MRA boundary have closed or significantly reduced their operations. This has resulted in number of vacant and underutilized commercial and institutional properties that are neglected or used for storage. In addition to the deteriorating structures, the vacant and underutilized properties contribute to the declining appearance of the Town.



Pedestrian Environment

Downtown has areas which lack adequate pedestrian facilities for the safe mobility of its residents and visitors. The unsafe and defective condition of the pedestrian environment substantially impairs the economic health of businesses and contributes to the declined appearance of the area.

While the downtown area has adequate sidewalks along Broadway, there remain discontinuous curbs and sidewalks in some areas. Some places have no pedestrian accommodation or have sidewalks or curb-cuts which end abruptly, creating hazards for users.



EXISTING DEMOGRAPHIC & ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

Introduction

The following sections identify the economic conditions that warrant designation of this area as a Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA). Demographic and economic conditions data and analysis is based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011-2015 American Community Survey estimates. Available data was used to evaluate the demographic and economic conditions. For the purposes of this report, demographic and economic data is derived from the census designated "Mountainair town, New Mexico."

Between 2000 and 2010 population declined 17% in the Town of Mountainair, from 1,116 to 928 individuals, while New Mexico's population grew at a rate of 1.25% annually. However, estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau suggest Mountainair is slowly gaining population, growing from the 2010 low of 928 individuals to 1,137 individuals living in the town now.

Median income and poverty rates are worse in Mountainair than they are compared to the state-wide average. The American Community Survey Five Year Estimates, 2011-2015, project that in New Mexico overall, 29.4% of all residents under 18 live at or below poverty. In Mountainair that percentage is more than double – 67.2% of the population under 18 lives at or below poverty. Median household income in Mountainair is lower than in New Mexico overall, \$34,907, compared to \$44,963

Demographics

Population

The total population of Mountainair in 2015 was 1,137 people according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates. The population of the town grew 2% between 2000 and 2015. Over the same period, New Mexico's population grew at an annual rate of 1.25%.

| Population | | |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|
| | Mountainair | New Mexico |
| Total Population | 1,137 | 2,084,117 |
| Male | 42.7% | 49.5% |
| Female | 57.3% | 50.5% |
| 18 years and over | 65.4% | 75.7% |
| 65+ years old | 13.6% | 14.7% |
| 0-9 years old | 17.1% | 13.4% |
| Median age | 36.7 | 37.0 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 69.0% | 47.4% |

The median age of residents is 36.7, about the same as the state median age of 37.0. The number of residents 65 years and older is 13.6% vs. 14.7% for New Mexico. Notable is the percentage of Mountainair’s population under 18 years old, estimated to be 34.6%, well above the statewide population of 24.3%.

Education

| Education of population over 25 | | |
|---|-------------|------------|
| | Mountainair | New Mexico |
| Population 25 years of age or older | | |
| No HS Diploma or Equivalent | 20.6% | 15.8% |
| High School Diploma or Equivalent | 42.8% | 26.4% |
| Some College or Associate’s Degree | 24.8% | 31.4% |
| Bachelor’s Degree or Higher | 11.7% | 26.3% |
| Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2015 | | |

While High School completion rates are higher in Mountainair than in the state overall, the percentage of the population over 25 with higher education degrees is considerably less, 11.7% compared to 26.3% statewide. Fewer of Mountainair’s residents have sought higher education, 24.8% of the population has some college or Associates degree, compared to 31.4% of the population state-wide.

Housing

About 61% of all housing units in Mountainair are occupied. In New Mexico overall, 84.0% of all housing units are occupied. In total, there are 229 homes in the Town left unoccupied out of 589 homes. Homeowner vacancy rate is only 3.3% in contrast to the rental vacancy rate of 38.3%. Most (65.7%) of the housing stock are single unit detached homes, 30.1% are mobile homes.

Homes are, on average, older. Over one quarter, 27.7%, were constructed prior to 1950, compared to 9.2% statewide. Nearly half, 48.8%, of all homes in Mountainair were estimated to have been built before 1970. 29.5% of New Mexico homes were built before 1970. 3.4% of homes in Mountainair have been constructed since 2010.

The majority of occupied homes are owner occupied, 79.4%. The median value of owner occupied homes in Mountainair is just \$ 80,000 – less than half of the median value seen across the state.

Income

Median household income in Mountainair is lower than in New Mexico overall, \$34,907, compared to \$44,963. Per capita income is less than half of the statewide average, \$11,556 vs. \$24,012.

| Income Distribution: Mountainair vs. New Mexico (2011-2015) | | |
|--|-------------|------------|
| | Mountainair | New Mexico |
| Median Household Income | \$ 34,907 | \$ 44,963 |
| <\$15,000 | 33.6% | 16.4% |
| \$15,000-\$24,999 | 23.3% | 12.8% |
| \$25,000-\$34,999 | 10.3% | 11.2% |
| \$35,000-\$49,999 | 18.3% | 14.1% |
| \$50,000-\$99,999 | 8.6% | 28.2% |
| \$100,000 and more | 5.9% | 17.5% |
| Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015 | | |

Poverty status in Mountainair in 2015 is far greater than we see in New Mexico overall. Of Mountainair’s population, 52.6% lives at or below the poverty level, compared to 21.0% state-wide. Only 37.7% of the population lives at 150 percent or greater of the poverty level, a much smaller proportion than the statewide average of 67.4%. The percentage of families below the poverty level in Mountainair is more than double that of New Mexico, 39.4% vs 15.9%. Looking at the individual poverty rate, 56.2% of Mountainair residents compared to the statewide rate of 21%.

Demographically, poverty among those under 18 is a larger problem in Mountainair than in the rest of the state. In New Mexico overall, 29.4% of all residents under 18 live at or below poverty. In Mountainair that percentage is notably higher – 67.2% of the population under 18 lives at or below poverty.

Economy

Employment

Composition of Work Force: Per the American Community Survey 2011-2015 estimate, the working age population of Mountainair residents (i.e. persons 16 years and older) was estimated at 788 with only 29.8% (235) of those in the labor force. The civilian labor force was estimated by ACS to have a 4.7%

unemployment rate in 2015 compared to 8.5% for New Mexico as a whole. The Statewide unemployment rate at the end of 2016 had dropped to 6.7%, Torrance County's was 8.7% for the same period, a decrease from the 11.2% County-wide estimate of the American Community Survey 2011-2015.

Employment by Industrial Sector:

| Mountainair Industry | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|
| Civilian Employed Population 16 Years And Over | Mountain-air | New Mexico |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining | 7.6% | 4.5% |
| Construction | 2.7% | 6.8% |
| Manufacturing | 7.1% | 4.7% |
| Wholesale trade | 0.0% | 2.2% |
| Retail trade | 4.5% | 11.3% |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities | 7.6% | 4.5% |
| Information | 1.8% | 1.6% |
| Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing | 2.7% | 4.5% |
| Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services | 7.1% | 11.2% |
| Educational services, and health care and social assistance | 39.7% | 25.1% |
| Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services | 0.0% | 11.1% |
| Other services, except public administration | 10.3% | 4.8% |
| Public administration | 8.9% | 7.7% |
| Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015 | | |

The largest sectors of employment in Mountainair are educational services, and health care and social assistance occupations (39.7% of employees); other services, except public administration (10.3% of employees); and public administration (8.9% of employees).

CONCLUSION

This report demonstrates the existing conditions within Mountainair's town center meet the criteria for "blighted" area designation as defined by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Code (3- 60A-8). The conditions described in this report detail a combination of factors which "...substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth and economic health and well-being of a municipality or locale within a municipality or an area that retards the provisions of housing accommodations or constitutes an economic or social burden and is a menace to the public health, safety, morals or welfare in its present condition and use;"

The designation of the Mountainair Metropolitan Redevelopment Area will assist the community in achieving the following goals:

- Elimination of detrimental public health and welfare conditions.
- Conservation, improvement and expansion of commercial building stock.
- Expansion of commercial activity.
- Improvement and expansion of available housing.
- Improvement and expansion of the pedestrian environment.
- Improvement of economic conditions through coordinated public and private investments.

With the powers made available to municipalities by the NM Metropolitan Redevelopment Code, the Town of Mountainair will be working with the private sector to create opportunities for new housing, assist in preserving existing businesses in the area, expand the business community and implement public improvements and investments in the town center.