

Highland District in the limelight

Albuquerque's Highland District is getting new attention now that the city has approved it as a metropolitan redevelopment area. The MRA designation would apply to the area between Carlisle and San Mateo, bounded on the north by Copper and the south by Zuni. The move means "this area has some priority in redevelopment, a pressing need, and the city is committed to changing this," said Marianne Dickinson, executive director of the Nob Hill Highland Renaissance Corp. The private-sector group has been lobbying for help to revitalize the neighborhood for years. Efforts to improve Highlands have been hampered by crime, obsolete zoning, inadequate parking and stubborn landowners insisting on unrealistic prices for property— all disincentives for developers, Dickinson said. The city appropriated \$100,000 to do an area plan when it approved the designation at its Aug. 5 meeting. "The MRA designation allows us to tap other funds outside the city, such as community development block grants, foundations or other private sources of money," Dickinson said. The designation also improves the city's ability to condemn property for public purposes, she added. A similar designation helped

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attract the Century Theatre and attending retail Downtown at Central and First Street, said Richard Asenap, coordinator of the MRA program, which is administered through the city's development services division of the planning department.

The MRA program is designed to focus on blighted areas: those with abandoned buildings, vacant lots and a general decline in businesses, Asenap said. The work begins by finding a property with some historic, cultural or economic significance and building around it, he explained.

For Highlands, that property is the De Anza Motor Lodge, built in 1939 by Zuni trader Charles G. Wallace, at 4301 Central NE. The 63-year-old motel has an art collection and murals. Wallace would often accept art as payment from American Indians traveling through Albuquerque.

The city is in negotiations to purchase the property and has set aside \$800,000 for it. Asenap said the property might be used for a museum or community center but its transformation would depend on a market study being done by Todd Clarke with Housing Resources Ltd. Clarke said he will start the study by mid-October and complete it within 60 days.

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ART AND MURALS: The historic Do Anza Motor Lodge is the focus of a redevelopment effort in the Highland District on Central Avenue.

Study suggests a boutique hotel

The best use of the De Anza Motor Lodge and restaurant at 4301 Central NE would be as a boutique hotel or bed and breakfast with perhaps a gallery or gift shop attached, said Todd Clarke, who was hired to assess the possibilities of the property.

Clarke said the property's dimensions and zoning ruled out large retail or industrial uses. The only other feasible use was small studio apartments.

"For a motel, it has fairly large rooms of 350 to 400 square feet," he said. "That's small by apartment standards, but big for motel rooms."

But neighborhood associations and merchants wanted a project that would revitalize the area, which eliminates student housing as an option, Clarke said. That leaves a boutique hotel with supporting services like gallery or gift shop and small restaurant as the most suitable use.

The De Anza was built in 1939 by Zuni trader and Indian art collector Charles G. Wallace. Its history and its preserved Zuni art work make it a natural for cultural tourists traveling Route 66, Clarke said.

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Center, 131 Monroe NE. Clarke hopes to complete his proposal by March 1.

awaiting Clarke's market study to determine the best use of the property.

The proposal for the mixed use project will be open for public comment Wednesday at the Highland Senior

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NEW USES: The De Anza Motor Lodge on Central could become a boutique hotel or bed and breakfast with perhaps a gift shop, according to a preliminary assessment.

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