

Apache Plume

A newsletter for the community of High Desert, Albuquerque, New Mexico

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City Has Big Plans to Develop Elena Gallegos With Large New Educational Center & Trails



By Neil Wetsch, Board Director

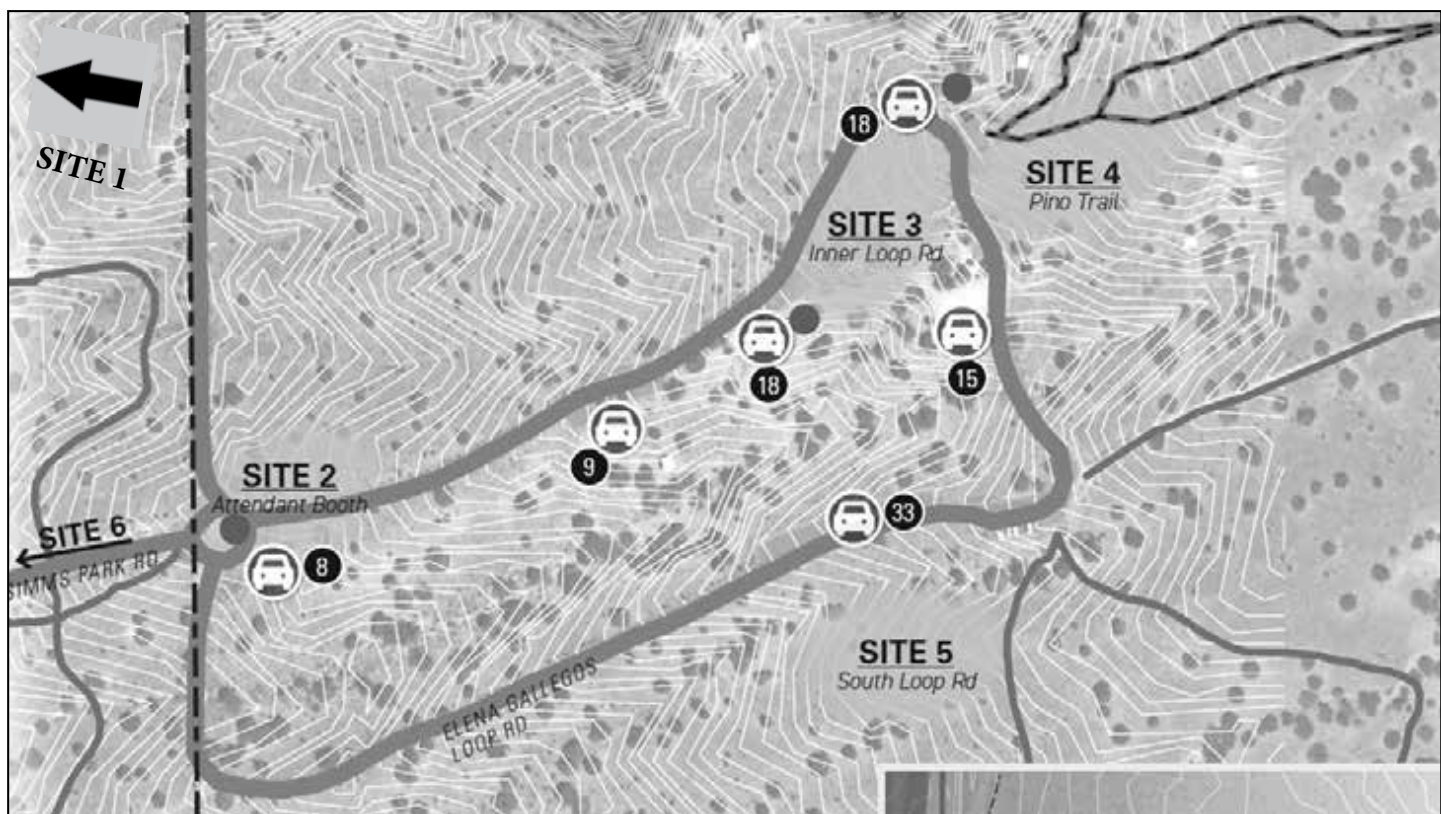
Big changes are afoot near our community, as explained to the High Desert Board of Directors at the January 18th meeting. The Board's Zoom meeting was highlighted by an Albuquerque Parks & Recreation Department online presentation of a rather surprisingly advanced plan to develop an Education Center and other major improvements in the Elena Gallegos Open Space area trailhead located between Sandia Heights and the northeastern edge of our High Desert community. This is a development plan not unlike the Education Center at Rio Grande Nature Center, located in the bosque of Albuquerque's North Valley.

The changes to the highly popular foothills area would be dramatic. Elena Gallegos Center will be larger, possibly almost double the size of her North Valley counterpart building, coming in with a building footprint of between 6,000 and 10,000 square feet. Inside there will be a large education space, cafe coffee shop, staff offices and indoor restrooms. A large outdoor viewing shed will be built in the area. By comparison, according to their website, the Nature Center building is 5,500 square feet.

As explained by the upbeat presentation of Tricia Keefer, City of Albuquerque Open Space Division Planner, Simms Park Road (designated "Site 6") would be widened with dedicated bike lanes in each direction. The hiking trail would remain. A proposed parking lot and bus shuttle area at the northeast corner intersection of Tramway/Simms would be built to transport visitors up and back down from the area during high usage occasions.

The city's objective is to make the open spaces of Elena Gallegos area more accessible and better known to the greater Albuquerque area public at large. The city representatives went on to say that special events, student field trips and additional parking, among other improvements, will encourage a greater public awareness, usage and appreciation of the spectacular natural beauty of this open space.

In addition to the road improvements, the infrastructure changes will include, but are not limited to, repaving the Loop Road used to access parking and trail heads, and updating the reservation entry area, vault toilets and picnic areas. The ADA accessible Cottonwood Springs Trail would also be updated.



This drawing from the city's website shows five of the possible sites for the proposed development. Site 1, near the Kiwanis picnic area, is just off the upper left of the drawing. Site 3, at the top of the Inner Loop Road, scored highest in the point system created by the landscape architect firm of Dekker/Perich/Sabatini hired by the city.

Possible Site Locations

Five possible site locations have been identified with preference given through a point system. Site 3 at the top of Inner Loop Road scored highest (see photo page 1). Ms. Keefer also mentioned Site 1, located above the Kiwanis picnic area at the most northeastern extent of the study area, as a possibility. However, while that site would require more infrastructure improvements with a new road and parking, it is located in a more open area with spectacular vistas. The old barn in that area is also slated for demolition.

Park and Recreation Director Dave Simon also spoke on behalf of the city and although no Neighborhood Impact Study was included in the presentation he assured the board that there would be opportunities for public input and exchange of ideas.

After the approximately 20-minute presentation, Board President, Reg Rider pledged the cooperation of the High Desert community going forward and a desire to work with the city on a mutual beneficial project.

FAQ

- **Size of Proposed Education Center:** 6-10,000 square feet
- **Proposed Cost:** 1) Education Center Improvements, Project 1515, \$2 million; to plan, design, construct, and otherwise improve the Education Center and outdoor spaces. 2) Other Foothills Open Space improvements, Project 1913, \$400,000; To plan, design, construct, demolish, preserve, rehabilitate and otherwise improve the open space in the foothills.
- **Consultants:** The Landscape Architect firm of Dekker/Perich/Sabatini was hired by the city. The firm developed the point system and scored each site.
- **Timeline:** The city is seeking funding for the proposal now. If that is obtained the project will eventually go forward with public input, site approval, further design and construction.

For more information and city updates go to <https://foothillseducationcenter.com>; from there you will find more details and a map of all the sites if you go to "meeting" then to "Exhibit Board" and finally to "View Here." Parks and Recreation also has a site: <https://www.cabq.gov>. You can check our community website www.highdesertliving.net and future Apache Plumes for updates.