



San Marcos Association Newsletter

January
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March
2002

Turquoise Trail Rebuild

Some Cerrillos citizens have been working with the N. M. Department of Transportation for seven years. Thousands of volunteer hours have been spent researching alternatives, examining standards and trying to convince the state to rebuild in a context sensitive way our National Scenic Byway which is quite a special road.

The NM State Highway Department (NMSHD) has been learning how to work with the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) and the reverse is equally true. There have been consultants hired by the NMSHD to work with the CAC to create context sensitive design approaches. Midway in the project, the NMSHD changed their primary engineering consultant and hired Parsons Brinkerhoff (PB).

There have been many stumbling blocks and disappointments. There has also been a great deal of progress in getting each group to see the road from somewhat nearer the other's point of view. The NMSHD and PB were mostly concerned with "safety" and "ride ability" issues and regulations. The CAC was more centrally focused on environmental and scenic quality, as well as traffic calming and safety issues.

The road is a New Mexico and Federal Scenic Byway. Businesses along the Turquoise Trail make their living from tourists who drive this Scenic Byway. The little dots which represent scenic roads on most road maps have already been removed from the northernmost part of the road. One look at the "improved" section from Lone Butte to I-25 will tell you why. The road was straightened, widened and leveled until it had lost all character. The initial plans of the NMSHD were even more expressway-like than that. The highway specifications do keep being "improved" each year or so.

Citizens could see the road becoming not only a facilitating feature for fast truck traffic and commuter community development, but a highway devoid of its former scenic character and accompanying tourist traffic. The battle was joined.

The existing section under consideration from Madrid to Lone Butte averages about 22 feet in paved width. This is two ten foot travel lanes and about a foot of paving beyond the outer white line. The earthen shoulder is another three feet or so on each side - less where there is a guard rail. Initial improvement plans would have had twelve foot lanes, 6 foot paved shoulders, another three feet of paved taper and three more of base course before getting to the earthen drainage ditch taper, ditch and upturn.

The road would have been a minimum of 42 feet in paved width and would have had a disturbed area of many more feet on each side. It would not have followed the contour of the landscape. It would have been straightened to a much greater extent than now planned. It would have been much worse than the section north of Lone Butte.

Some of this is because highway designers are not trained as architects but as engineers. Some, or even most, of the expanse was because of ever-increasing national standards for road building. As an example, consider design speed and the required "clear zone" beyond the outside white line. The existing section is legal for a posted speed of 55 mph. Keeping in mind that design speed is some 10 mph greater than posted speed, to keep the same speed, the clear zone would be over 25 feet. It is 12 feet at a posted 30 mph, 16 feet at 40 mph and would be 20 feet at 45 mph. Most of the rebuilt road will be posted at 40.

There is a need for major work on the road. The bridges need replacement. There are intersections which should be made safer and the road bed is degrading. While "no build" was originally the only available option to save any of the scenic character of the road, many years of work have brought increasingly acceptable designs.

San Marcos District Planning

We still have not appeared before the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) to formally request planning permission. We began talking to members of the planning staff in February of 2001 and met with Javier Gonzales in March. Due to an understaffed planning department and other requests for planning to go forward, it has taken a year to get this far.

In a December meeting with Javier, Jack Kolkmeier (County Planning Director) and staff, we presented our desires only to be told that things were uncertain and that, while things could be done to meet some of our needs prior to planning, the department was still greatly understaffed. The interim measures involved ordinances to enact real protection for lands already designated as Resource Protection areas by the BCC and a moratorium on the continued, unplanned commercial sprawl down the Turquoise Trail.

We were to go before the BCC at the end of January in coordination with a Planning Department mid-term budget and evaluation presentation. Plans changed, and that presentation is not to be. With the Commissioners as busy as they are, our most recent letters, emails and telephone calls to Javier Gonzales and Jack Sullivan have gone unanswered. There is a related article which will explain the addition of Commissioner Sullivan.

There is a need to start our planning effort before the big sections of property are all planned privately. It is not that the owners of these properties will do a bad job, just that regional cooperation and coordination can always help to produce a better outcome for the greater community. There is also a need to consider the best locations of commercial zones and potential mining zones before new pressures arise for these activities at unplanned locations.

Jack Kolkmeier is being as cooperative as possible, given the staffing limitations within his department. The Planning Ordinance is under review at the request of the Commission, and we need approval to look at the present draft. Things in New Mexico rarely move too fast. When officials are too busy to respond, things move even more slowly.

Those of you on our email list will be kept up-to-date as to any progress.

Most of the new road will have 11 foot lanes. Only curved sections below a certain radius will be 12 feet and those will have a two foot separation of the center stripe so that they will appear only 11 feet wide for traffic calming. The paved shoulders will be 4 feet wide and the pavement is to extend only a foot into the taper. This brings the average paved width down to 32 feet. While not as intimate as the 22 we have now, it is a lot better than 42.

There are far too many details of guard rails, revegetation, existing vegetation protection, surface treatment, materials choices, etc. to go into here. The short of it is that it was a lot of work for everyone. It does now seem that it was worth it. But, only time will tell.

The S.M.A. would like to thank the people from PB and NMSHD who have learned as they experimented with a new level of citizen involvement. We would also like to thank all who have worked on the CAC. Particular recognition must go to Ross Lockridge and Tom Parker whose combined volunteer hours spent on this project over some seven years would have been more than a full-time job for most people.

Who is the S.M.A.?

We think that you are. There have been two encounters since the last newsletter which we feel should be addressed. One has to do specifically with the planning issue. The other is about who the S.M.A. represents.

We ran into a man who lives in Silverado who was worried about planning. He thought that any planning would mean more rules and more things he could not do with his land. It is easy to see why someone would think that, but that is not what community planning is about.

His specific concern had to do with his ability to replace his mobile home if the existing one burned or otherwise needed replacement. Any rules governing this already exist. The community planning contemplated would give our San Marcos Area more local control in deciding **where** certain kinds of development might occur. It would also give us the ability to form our own Community Development Review Committee. The issues are about local decisions and local control - not about more rules.

The second instance occurred when another local person expressed the belief that the San Marcos Association did not represent the average people of such communities as Cerrillos, Madrid and Silverado. The belief was that the S.M.A. was made up of a bunch of late-arrival "yuppies". Besides the fact that few of the board members are of an age to qualify as yuppies, and many are long term residents, there are very many dues-paying members from the communities mentioned.

The argument was that there were no members of these communities on the S.M.A. Board of Directors, thus the S.M.A. did not represent them. It continued that the S.M.A. had fought against mining proposals which might have added jobs to Cerrillos.

Try as we might, we cannot attract additional Board members very easily. We would greatly appreciate having more community members join the Board. The fact is that people from these areas do come to the board when there are problems or requests, and we do represent them. If we do not represent these areas, who does?

Some 300 people showed up for a meeting with Javier Gonzales about the Buffalo Mountain mining proposal. Included were most of the people of Cerrillos and a lot from Madrid. When Javier asked how many were in favor of the mining proposal (how many were seeking jobs) not one person raised a hand. Most knew there were no new jobs to be had, just a few Albuquerque employees to be transferred to the site. Others thought

that a few jobs would not be worth the degradation of the quality of life in the area.

If you have thought the S.M.A. was an organization for some selective group within our greater community, please think again. We are as we have always said: "your organization".

WAP is gone!

After many false starts and many meetings called off, J. R. Hale withdrew its application to blast away half of Buffalo Mountain.

The last minute decision changes and the moving of dates finally ended with a meeting between Charles Gonzales (County Land Use), people from J. R. Hale, Bill Good and Richard Crombie. It was understood by all that the effort to get the proposal through the BCC, on appeal, would not succeed. Hale wanted to try to get some assurance that there might be some place in the area where a mining effort would be approved. J. R. Hale received no guarantees.

It was pointed out that the Commissioners intended to ask future planning committees to consider whether there was an appropriate place for a mining zone. It was also mentioned that the San Marcos Area was seeking planning authority.

Real consideration will certainly be given to this question as part of any planning effort in which the S.M.A. takes part. One of the many reasons we are seeking planning authority sooner rather than later is so that this important decision can be made with appropriate community involvement as part of an integrated plan and not made by County Officials responding to commercial proposals on an individual basis.

New County Representation

The redrawing of the County Commission districts has split the San Marcos area. Our first reaction was that this is a bad thing. Javier Gonzales has represented almost the entire area for some time. He knew who we are. He has been as accessible as one can be who is usually over scheduled and very busy on many fronts. We trust that this will continue to be the case.

Upon reflection, we realized that having two Commissioners representing our area gave us more potential entry into the system. Jack Sullivan is in a position to help us fill in the planning blank next to the communities of Eldorado and the Community College District which he also represents. Javier will still represent La Cienega, Cerrillos and Madrid and San Pedro. All six of the above mentioned communities have plans approved or under way.

We are the space in the middle. We are the unplanned area into which things can be pushed if they do not meet with the plans of our surrounding communities. We must get moving, and now we have two Commissioners who should be willing to help us.

Those of you who have attended a County Commission meeting in the last few months know how well prepared Commissioner Sullivan is. If he is as attentive to our issues as he has been to others, his representation will be a plus.

As you can see from the map at the right, those living south or west of CR 45, west of SR 14 and south of the 44/45 intersection, and anywhere south of CR 42 are still in District 3 which is now represented by Javier Gonzales. This district will now include Galisteo, Edgewood and 50% of the County's land area.

Those to the north or east of these boundaries will be in the new District 5 represented by Jack Sullivan. We share him with Eldorado, the Community College district and small sections north of I-25.

The San Marcos Association
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Membership is open to any resident/property owner in the San Marcos area.

Please know that most of the funds of the San Marcos Association come from your annual dues. 2002 dues are \$15 per person or \$25 for a household membership. The mailing of the newsletter is a considerable expense, and the Association does need your dues as well as your involvement.

If your year 2002 dues are owing, please send a check to:
San Marcos Association, P. O. Box 722, Cerrillos, NM 87010-0722. Please fill in and include this form.

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