

EAST FASSBINDER HOMESTEAD  
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

SEPTEMBER, 2006

## **INTRODUCTION**

The neighborhood's plan purpose is to preserve, enhance, and promote the assets of the neighborhood. It is adopted by resolution as an amendment to the Durango Comprehensive Plan and becomes the official guiding document for this neighborhood in the City.

The plan attempts to be broad based in order to represent the interests of the entire neighborhood. The neighborhood plan is a record of what the neighborhood will do and how it will accomplish the activities spelled out in the plan.

Creating a neighborhood plan requires much effort. Neighbors worked together to identify issues and create the recommendations in this document.

Expectations of the neighborhood plan need to be established up-front to understand its role, purpose and limitations. A neighborhood plan serves as a guide for land use changes and development proposals. It is also a "call to action" document that can be used by the neighborhood and the City to list, prioritize and address issues that are identified during the process.

What is presented here is an attempt to balance the needs of the residents, businesses, institutions and the community.

## BACKGROUND

The original neighborhood plan was adopted in 1982, the first neighborhood plan created and adopted in the City of Durango. The evolution of this first neighborhood plan began in January of 1982 when a group of neighborhood residents submitted two petitions to have their neighborhood rezoned. The petitioners sought the rezoning in order to retain the residential character of the neighborhood. They stated:

"There has been an increasing interest in purchasing private homes for the use of medical facilities. We were under the impression that this area would remain only residential. An almost unanimous opinion of the people living in this area [is] that the neighborhood is very valuable as residential because of its proximity to the church, the hospital and the convenient distance for shopping."

An originator of the petitions stated to the Planning Commission that, while homeowners wish to preserve the residential character of the neighborhood, they are being confronted with realtors wanting to buy their property for use as doctors' offices because of the area's zoning and its proximity to Mercy Medical Center. The Planning Commission tabled the neighborhood rezone request until a neighborhood plan was developed.

The plan described the character of the neighborhood, defined the issues it faced, and made several recommendations. The plan established the basis to allow thirteen properties to rezone from R-3 (multi-family) to R-2 (duplex and single-family). In addition, the plan permitted Mercy Medical Center (Mercy) to expand onto East Third Avenue. The plan provided a good description of the neighborhood and served the neighborhood well for many years.

The neighborhood plan was updated in 1994 after a long and sometimes volatile process. The 1994 plan attempted to address the changing conditions in the neighborhood. The need to update the plan became obvious when Mercy approached the City in 1992 with its expansion plans. The City required that a neighborhood meeting be held to discuss this expansion. Mercy was also required to submit a long range development plan addressing all anticipated expansions. A neighborhood meeting was held and the need for the neighborhood plan to be updated was agreed upon.

The neighborhood residents organized and decided that they needed a name that gave them their own identity. They decided to call themselves the East Fassbinder Homestead Neighborhood Association. The neighborhood held numerous meetings and the results of those meetings, a neighborhood survey, and additional data collected throughout the neighborhood were compiled and form the basis of the plan.

Several of the neighborhood residents expressed frustration in that the old plan did not prevent Mercy Medical Center from expanding. The old plan in fact allowed for Mercy to grow, however, the amount of expansion that occurred at the Mercy campus was not accounted for. There were several reasons Mercy grew so dramatically. The first and most compelling was the closing of Community Hospital, with only one hospital, Mercy now had to meet the medical needs for the entire community. The second reason dealt with the desire of physicians to locate their offices near the hospital. The neighborhood had successfully rezoned a number of properties in the neighborhood which limited the locations that offices could be established. The result was physicians wanting more office space on the Mercy campus.

The neighborhood found itself in 1993 again confronting the same or at least a similar need that it had in 1982 - the need to preserve the residential character of the neighborhood. The urgency to update the neighborhood plan had become evident: conditions and circumstances had changed, some of the recommendation that were developed during the 1982 planning process were never carried out, and in some cases the recommended course of action was no longer possible.

As with all planning documents, there comes a time when a plan needs to be updated to address the changing conditions of the neighborhood and the community as a whole. This document is an update of the 1994 neighborhood plan, as much of the old plan remains a part of this document,

especially **the overall neighborhood goal of maintaining the neighborhood as a viable, stable, safe and attractive place to live, work and recreate.**

This plan has several functions: 1) to update the existing neighborhood plan, and 2) to prepare a call to action that will allow the neighborhood to be proactive in developing/maintaining the type of neighborhood it wants. As the neighborhood learned from past experience, it can not sit back and expect a document that is over ten years old to protect them; it must stay involved to preserve the delicate balance of uses in the neighborhood. The neighbors know that much of what attracted them to the neighborhood in the first place - the diversity - competes with their interests and threaten what is cherished in the neighborhood.

## DESCRIPTION

The character of this neighborhood has been molded by history, land use and particularly by its residents.

The East Fassbinder Homestead Neighborhood is located in the center of Durango, which helps explain why the majority of its residents cite location as one of the things they like the most about the neighborhood. The neighborhood is bounded on the west by Main Avenue, on the north by Junction Creek, on the east and south by the Animas River. This boundary is slightly different from the original plan which had the western boundary being the alley between East Second Avenue and Main Avenue. The neighborhood is very fortunate to have Junction Creek and the Animas River border it on three sides.

The large trees shading the streets and in Viles Park give the neighborhood a character, intimacy and continuity seen in few other areas of the City. In addition, the uniqueness and variety of land uses in the neighborhood is not found elsewhere in Durango. Businesses, a school, two day care centers, a church, health practitioners offices, and families all strive to live and work together in a relatively compact area.

The 1982 Neighborhood Plan described the neighborhood as follows:

In general, average residents are homeowners living in one to two member households. They are in the middle income bracket, and live in single-family homes that are over 40 years old but in good condition. Most of them do make use of available passive recreation activities in the neighborhood. They are generally satisfied with traffic and safety provisions in the neighborhood but feel noise (mainly from sirens and traffic) is at times a problem. They feel the neighborhood is a good place to live and raise a family. They have lived in the neighborhood a long time and plan to remain there a long time. Thus, they hope the neighborhood will remain much as it is, but they fear adverse changes will result from encroachment by Mercy Hospital and commercial interests.

The plan continues to describe the neighborhood as stable, middle class, safe, attractive and quiet.

It is notable that so much about the neighborhood is the same as it was in 1982 and in 1994. The homes are generally the same though a bit older, noise remains a problem although it has gotten better, and the fear of adverse changes in the neighborhood is the major neighborhood issue, however instead of encroachment of the hospital now it is redevelopment of the Mercy Campus.

Most of the issues that were mentioned during the neighborhood meetings were not seen as major issues. Overall, the neighbors had few complaints and were very content with the neighborhood. This is consistent with the response from the surveys conducted in 1982 and again in 1993. This is a remarkable feat; in fact, the only major issue has been the actual or threatened encroachment of non-residential uses. This encroachment issue was the major issue addressed in the 1994 plan. The continued encroachment into the neighborhood by the hospital is no longer an issue, as the hospital has relocated to Grandview. However, the neighborhood residents want to ensure that the reuse of the hospital property does not denigrate the neighborhood. One of the themes heard at the neighborhood meetings was to take back their neighborhood and not allow uses that will impact the residences. While the hospital has been in the neighborhood as long as the residents have, the impact of the hospital clearly increased over the years and the residential properties have had to deal with the impacts of this vital public use.

### Character

A term frequently used when a neighborhood plan is developed is the "character" of the neighborhood. In fact, quality of life issues are often addressed as character. One of the themes mentioned over and over in the neighborhood meetings and talked about in the 1982 plan was preserving the character of the neighborhood. East Fassbinder Homestead Neighborhood is unique, it is diverse and it has historical roots. Balancing the competing needs of the existing uses is

complex and the impetus for updating the 1994 plan. Many of the recommendations listed throughout this plan are an attempt to reinforce the character of the neighborhood.

## **History**

Durango was incorporated in 1881 and several buildings in the neighborhood were built around that time. Four homes on East Park were built in 1882-83. St. Columba's church was one of the earliest structures in the area, establishing a convent in 1882.

The neighborhood was primarily farmland in 1881. Various apple trees growing throughout the neighborhood that were originally part of a large orchard still remain. The area began to fill in gradually after the turn of the century; however, a family in the 1900 block of East Third Avenue recalls there were still four empty lots when they built their house in 1948. Most of the houses along Alamo Drive were built in the 1950s. It is significant that, with the exception of Alamo Drive, most homes in the neighborhood were built by their initial owners instead of by developers. Thus, most homes are distinctly individualistic.

This area was home to some of Durango's early and distinguished residents, including the Pingrey family whose original homestead extended across Junction Creek to the current high school location. Senator Rowe Pingrey married Mary Graham (of the Graham Hardware family) and had five children. Other families significant in Durango's history who lived in the neighborhood include Brannen, Klahn, Fassbinder, Roberts, Barela, Brennan, Smith, Dwyer, Nolan, Schluter and Malberg.

St. Columba's Church has occupied its present site on the corner of East Second Avenue and East 18th Street for over 100 years. The entire block belongs to St. Columba's and now consists of the "Old Red Building", built in the 1920s, the "New School", built in 1958, the parish house, a day care center and a large playground.

The spring at the Fish Hatchery was originally part of the Fassbinder Ranch. One resident recalled in 1994 that, as a girl, she would visit the "zoo" on the current fish hatchery property. The zoo still existed in 1931 and was run by the Isaac Newton League, a conservation group. Formerly, the hatchery was located 12 miles north of town and started in 1893. It moved to town in 1903 and has been at the present site since then. The current museum was built in 1927 with a major expansion in 1979.

The sisters of Mercy came to Durango in 1882 and began a school and a convent. In 1884, Mother Baptist began making plans for a separate hospital facility and construction began late that year. "In 1885, Mercy built on ground donated by Peter Fassbinder and Schyuler Smith." (Pioneers of the San Juan, V.4, p.115) In April 1885, the first patients were admitted to a hospital with 25 beds. The first medical staff was organized in 1896 and in 1913 Mercy opened a nursing school. Over the years Mercy Medical Center has undergone major expansions in the 1930s, 1952, 1971, 1985 and 1993. As medical science and technology develop, the historical data reflect a major growth cycle each ten years.

Since the original plan in 1982, the lifestyle of the neighborhood has changed. This change has resulted in conversion of homes to businesses, increased number of rental units, no residential dwellings on Main Avenue, and conversion of single-family dwellings to parking.

The neighborhood is undergoing another major transition. Mercy Medical Center is moving out and the property is being purchased by the City of Durango. The City purchased the property to be used for a new library. The changes proposed by the City and the owners of the medical office condominium precipitated the need to update the neighborhood plan.

## **LAND USE AND ZONING**

### **Existing Conditions**

The neighborhood is characterized of having a mixed land use pattern. The residential area is composed of a number of stable single-family homes, several duplexes and one multi-family building with nine units.

St. Columba Church and School Complex occupies an entire block. The school has students enrolled in kindergarten through the eighth grade. The Church also operates a day care in the neighborhood. The remainder of the block has the church, parish house and playground.

Mercy Medical Center has relocated to Grandview and most of the associated medical offices have followed. The City of Durango is under contract to purchase the hospital property. The existing hospital building will be demolished. The City of Durango intends to construct the new Durango Public Library on the portion of the site adjacent to the Animas River. The medical condominium buildings will remain on the site. The City and the owners of the medical condominium units would like to increase the types of uses that are allowed on the property under the Planned Development.

Two single-family homes have been converted in the neighborhood to medical clinics. A doctor's office occupies one property on the 1900 block of East 2nd Avenue. A dentist's office is on the corner of East Park Avenue and East 2nd Avenue. Both of these properties are zoned EN-RM-10 (Residential, Multi-family), which allows medical clinics.

Along Main Avenue there are commercial uses, including five motels, a drive-in banking facility, a gas station, a convenience store with gas pumps, two tire stores, a fast-food restaurant, a store specializing in home health care products and an office building. One of the motels is currently being converted to a tile and lighting store. The commercial uses front on Main Avenue; consequently, most of the activity associated with the businesses is directed away from the residential areas.

A large parcel of land in the southernmost part of the neighborhood is occupied by the Colorado Division of Wildlife Fish Hatchery which rears fish for stocking the lakes and streams in Southwestern Colorado.

There is one municipal park, Viles Park, in the neighborhood. It is a tree-shaded triangle of land bounded by East Park Avenue, East Second Avenue and East 18th Street.

There is a large amount of open space in the neighborhood, some of which is privately owned. The Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad owns right-of-way along the Animas River. The state owned fish hatchery has some vacant land associated with it. Junction Creek is to the north of the neighborhood with Rank Park just north of the creek.

A day-care center owned and operated by Mercy Medical Center was opened in a converted single-family home, the Pingrey house, on a 1.6 acre parcel. The parcel is referred to as the Pingrey Annex. A 60-space parking lot to serve the hospital uses was also constructed on the parcel. The day care and parking lot are separated from the homes on Alamo by a hillside. The hillside was designated as open space and will remain as a buffer between the old Mercy campus and the homes on Alamo Drive

The neighborhood is mostly zoned EN-2 (Residential, Single/Two Family) which allows single-family homes and duplexes. There still remains a large amount of multi-family zoned property in the neighborhood, including the St. Columba Church complex and about half of the properties on East Second Avenue between East Park Avenue and East 20th Street. The Mercy Medical Center complex was rezoned to Planned Development (PD) in 1994. The commercial strip along Main Avenue is zoned LC (Light Commercial). The state fish hatchery has a zoning designation of PB (Public) which is what all publicly owned property in the City is zoned.

## **ISSUES:**

*Loss of neighborhood character*

- *single-family homes*
- *residential units*

- *parking lots*  
*Zoning inconsistent with the existing land use pattern*  
*Encroachment of businesses/clinics into residential areas*  
*Need to preserve historical structures*  
*Need to maintain property values*  
*New uses on medical campus*  
*New uses for medical offices*  
*Convenient parking for medical office buildings*  
*Conversion of single-family homes into rentals and creation of new duplexes*  
*Adequate setbacks of new construction*  
*Increase housing in the neighborhood*  
*Maintain mature trees and landscaping*  
*Continue / maintain tree lawns*  
*Restore neighborhood character with senior housing and facilities*

### **Mercy Medical Center Property**

The City of Durango is under contract to purchase the portion of the property owned by Mercy Medical Center, which includes the main hospital campus, the parking lot on E. Third Avenue, the Pingrey Annex and Unit 16 of the Durango Medical Center Condominium Complex. The contract with Mercy includes the demolition of the exiting hospital building and unit 16 of the medical condos. The City is planning to construct the new Durango Public Library on a portion of the main hospital complex. The two existing medical office condominiums will remain. The owners of those buildings are requesting additional uses as many of the medical offices that were occupying the buildings followed the hospital out to Grandview.

The City of Durango commissioned a study of the site in November, 2005. The master plan process involved a number of public workshops to discuss new uses on the property as well as where new building could be built. The main emphasis of the study was to determine the best location for the new library building. The City Council approved the Conceptual Master Plan for the Development of Mercy Medical Center Site, in February 2006.

The finalization of the conceptual master plan was the kick off of the neighborhood plan update process that was necessary to amend the Mercy Medical Center Planned Development to address the redevelopment of the campus. In addition to the neighborhood plan process the City began a series of meeting with the residents and owners of the medical condominiums to discuss reuse options for their properties and the resulting PD amendment process.

The major discussion item during these meetings focused on what new uses should be allowed on the campus site. Uses proposed by the medical condo owners and the City were discussed during neighborhood meetings and a resulting list of uses was agreed upon in principal. The actual list of uses will be decided on during the review of the Mercy PD Amendment process. The new uses will be listed as allowed uses, special uses, conditional uses and uses not allowed. Uses allowed include the library, other government offices, medical offices and related uses, and professional offices. Special uses, which require a special use permit to be established, include a number of public benefit uses, such as day care centers, cultural and religious uses and educational uses. Conditional uses, which require public hearings in front of the Planning Commission and the City Council, include multifamily residential, nursing homes, vocational schools and recreational facilities. Uses not allowed include 24 hour uses (except a 24 hour urgent care facility which is a conditional use), retail uses and financial institutions.

During the neighborhood meetings, a number of the residents presented a letter supporting the use of the property for meeting the needs of senior citizens. In particular, they would like to consider utilizing some of the property to meet the needs as outlined in the Senior Program Advisory Committee's Report to the La Plata County Commissioners, September, 2005. Many of the uses are listed in the PD, including adult day care, assisted care facility and nursing homes. Senior housing would be considered as multi-family residential. Other specific uses for seniors are not listed separately as they are covered in the broader land use categories. The neighborhood wanted to emphasis that uses meeting the needs of the senior population would be welcomed into the neighborhood and hopes to encourage them.

The day care on the Pingrey Annex is currently vacant as Mercy relocated their child care to a new facility in Grandview. The Mercy Child Care was licensed for 40 children. The City is considering a lease request to utilize the building for the Roberta Shirley Headstart Day Care for 31 children. The terms of the lease have not been decided upon. The structure will most likely remain a day care center until such time as the property is redeveloped.

### **St. Columba**

St. Columba's Church and associated uses occupy a block. The school has been at capacity over the years, and would like to have more room. The 1994 plan stated that while they do not have any plans at the present time to relocate, it is not infeasible that in the future they will relocate out of the neighborhood.

### **State Fish Hatchery**

The State Fish Hatchery previously looked at moving to another site. However, it appears that at least for the foreseeable future they will continue at their present location.

### **Other Land Use Issues**

The 1994 Plan stated the following:

Maintaining the character of neighborhoods could become an issue throughout Durango if property values continue to rapidly increase. A potential outcome (one seen in other communities) is that the property becomes more valuable than the house and a lot is purchased the house is leveled, and a huge "trophy" home is built. The result is the loss of the character of the neighborhood as homes become out of scale. Another outcome of the healthy rental market is the conversion of single-family homes to duplexes and apartments. The more multi-unit structures that are built, or the more that conversions occur, the more the neighborhood becomes a place dominated by rental units which impacts the stability of the neighborhood.

In 2004, this was found to be true throughout the City of Durango. The City implemented a moratorium on new construction over 25 feet in height and began a study to look at compatibility issues in the established neighborhoods. The City adopted the Residential Infill Design Guidelines and rezoned all of the residential properties in the established neighborhoods. The East Fassbinder Homestead Neighborhood was rezoned as a part of that study. The majority of the properties are now zoned EN-2. The multi-family properties were rezoned to EN-RM-10. The new ordinance reduced the size and scale of new residential construction; however it does not prevent the scraping of historic houses nor does it deal with the conversion into rental units.

Another issue, the driving issue behind the 1982 plan, was the ability of medical offices to replace residential units in the RM (multi-family) zones. This potential still exists on a number of properties, as the zoning code continues to allow medical offices in RM zones. However, the likelihood of additional conversions in neighborhood has decreased with the relocation of the hospital. Although the urgency has lessened, one of the recommendations remains to examine uses allowed under the current zoning code, and in particular, to determine the impact of clinics in multi-family zones and investigate the feasibility of changing the ordinance.

In addition, the neighborhood is interested in assessing the current zoning in the entire neighborhood. The rezoning effort in 1983 succeeded in the successful rezoning of 13 single-family homes from R3 to R2 (under the City's 1994 zoning designations it would be from RM to RST-8). There is interest in trying to rezone those remaining single-family homes from multi-family (EN-RM-10) to residential two-family (EN-2). There is also some interest in assessing the impacts of rezoning other parts of the neighborhood, in particular, rezoning Alamo Drive from a zone that allows duplexes to a single-family zone. Both of these rezoning issues should be explored.

### **Historical Preservation**

The East Fassbinder Homestead Neighborhood is rich in history. The historical building survey of the neighborhood pointed out that a number of the homes and buildings built over 100 years ago

still exist. Mercy Hospital, St. Columba church and original school building and fish hatchery buildings all have a long history. The demolition of Mercy Medical Center, while not destroying historic buildings is changing the history of the neighborhood. The City and Mercy should work together to incorporate some sort of historical marker on the redeveloped campus to signify the importance of the hospital in the neighborhood and on the site. There is a need to preserve the history of the neighborhood which is so ingrained with the history of the City of Durango. Several recommendations were developed to preserve and document the history of the neighborhood.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **High Priorities**

- 1. All future development within the neighborhood should be restricted to be of similar size, bulk, density, and character to existing development.*
- 2. The development of the Mercy PD property should be in conformance with the Conceptual Master Plan for the Development of Mercy Medical Center Site, February 2006.*
- 3. Discourage the rezoning or conversion of residential properties to non-residential uses.*
- 4. Preserve the residential structures and encourage family residency throughout the neighborhood.*
- 5. Uses not listed in the PD shall be only allowed after a major amendment to the PD.*
- 6. No future surface parking lots beyond the Mercy PD boundaries should be constructed in the neighborhood. Future parking needs shall be satisfied with on-site parking.*

### **Medium Priorities**

- 1. Analyze the issue of making the zoning more consistent with the existing land use pattern. Assess rezoning of some RM properties to RST-8; assess rezoning some of the RST-8 properties to RS-5.*
- 2. Determine and assess the impact of clinics in residential zones, and investigate the feasibility of changing the ordinance.*
- 3. Incorporate a historical marker into the redeveloped Mercy site to acknowledge the importance of the hospital in the neighborhood and to the City..*
- 4. Encourage the preservation of historic buildings in the neighborhood by the establishment of historical designations for eligible properties.*

## COMMUNITY LIFE AND INVOLVEMENT

The 1994 plan had a number of community life issues that were identified over the plan process. During this plan update process a number of issues that were previously identified are not longer neighborhood issues. However, there were issues identified which had to do with improving/restoring the appearance and ambiance of the neighborhood. These referred to litter, dogs running loose, noise and the loss of neighbors. In general, the neighborhood does not have the same need for a call to action that they felt they needed in 1994 as the threat of the neighborhood being overrun by the hospital was eliminated with the 1994 Planned Development. Now that the hospital has left the neighborhood, the issues are different.

### Community Services

One social characteristic of the neighborhood is the community services available to its residents. Overall, many services are relatively convenient to the neighborhood. While the hospital is no longer located in the neighborhood an urgent care facility was recently opened to provide drop in medical care. The addition of the new library will provide the neighborhood with additional services. Other public benefit uses on the campus might provide other types of civic activity within the neighborhood.

### **ISSUES:**

*Preservation and sharing of historical importance of neighborhood*  
*Reclaim neighborhood emphasis the residential aspect of the neighborhood*  
*Maintain communication with the non-residential property owners*  
*Loss of neighbors*  
*Loss of neighborhood character*  
*Litter along the river, lack of trash cans*  
*Trash and vegetation in the alleys*  
*Loose dogs*  
*Neighborhood public art projects*  
*Reduce neighborhood noise*

The neighborhood association re-established itself during 1993, spurred into action because of Mercy's proposals; the residents felt that what they valued in the neighborhood was being eroded away. As stated in the 1994 plan, *maintaining an active association once a crisis is over is a challenge for any newly formed group. While the momentum will fade, the need to accomplish the goals established continues. Keeping the neighborhood association active is a high priority. Taking on some of the small fun projects listed in the recommendations will help keep the neighborhood active.*

The neighborhood association is no longer active, however, the neighbors involved in the plan update wanted to keep a number of recommendation in the plan for the future. As with most community organizations they tend to surface when a threat is being felt, the fact that the neighborhood association is not active is an indication that the residents do not feel that there are pressing issues that need to be addressed. However, creating a forum to open the lines of communication is vital to the health of the neighborhood. One of the first steps would be to re-establish the neighborhood association. A second step will be to outreach to the different entities and other residents in the neighborhood to become a part of the association; the fact is most of the issues affect the entire neighborhood, not just a portion of it.

As mentioned in several other sections of this plan, loss of neighbors has been a major neighborhood concern over the years. While specific recommendations can be made to preserve the appearance of residential units, encouraging families to move back in the neighborhood is not something that can be done with regulations. This issue is also discussed in two other sections of this plan, Land Use and Zoning and Housing.

People move into an area for a variety of reasons. The 1993 survey highlighted what brought a number of the residents to this neighborhood. Location was the number one response, as this neighborhood is one of the best located neighborhoods in the City, convenient to shopping, recreation, medical offices, the hospital, and St. Columba church, school, day care, and public transit. With the exception of the hospital and some of the medical offices, all of these other

opportunities still exist in the neighborhood and with the planned new library; the neighborhood will be served by even more services.

The 1994 plan had a number of the Community Life and Involvement issues that involved the appearance of the neighborhood. During the recent neighborhood meetings, the appearance of the neighborhood was not as much of an issue, as in general properties are being well maintained. However, many of the recommendations which came out of the 1994 plan were ways to enhance the appearance of the neighborhood and they can also be used to strengthen the neighborhood association. The recommendations have been reformatted into a list of ideas that can be utilized by a neighborhood organization to establish communication and promote community involvement through fun activities.

Many of the residents have lived in the neighborhood a very long time, and many of the houses have been passed down in the family. The three major non-residential land uses (the church complex, hospital complex and fish hatchery) have also been in the neighborhood a long time. That sense of history and roots has made this neighborhood even more special. A number of the recommendations try to preserve the sense of history and integrity found in this neighborhood.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **High Priorities**

1. *Re-establish the neighborhood association.*
2. *Promote the development of land uses that are consistent with the neighborhood plan and plan policies.*
3. *Promote development that is consistent with the adopted Master Plan on the “old” Mercy site.*
4. *Maintain/strengthen working relationships between the residents, St. Columba, businesses and the City.*
5. *New Construction including building expansions should be designed in such a way that utility noise (air-conditioning compressor, fans, etc.) is suppressed to a minimum and is directed away from neighborhood residents.*
6. *Consider and accommodate solar access where possible in new development.*
7. *Utilize dark sky principles in all new development.*
8. *Encourage the utilization of green building techniques in all developments.*
9. *Design new construction so that the building steps down to the neighborhoods, with the tallest buildings being in the center.*

### **Medium Priorities**

1. *Utilize the neighborhood organization to establish communication and promote community involvement through activities such as:*
  - *Utilize a neighborhood newsletter*
  - *Sponsor neighborhood social events and activities*
  - *Educate the neighborhood about the importance of responsible property upkeep, maintaining property values, discouraging crime, encouraging residents to move in, etc.*
  - *Work with the schools, day-care centers, etc., to do joint community pride projects, such as cleaning up along the river and creek, and raising funds for playground improvements.*
  - *Establish programs to aid the elderly and physically disabled in the maintenance of their property, such as a neighborhood voucher/networking system.*

- *Publicize programs that can help citizens.*
- *Put together a reference list to distribute throughout the neighborhood that identifies who to contact for specific problems, such as dogs at large, owners who do not clean up after their dogs, , loud parties, etc.*
- *Create a historical record documenting neighbors and buildings. Utilize the newsletter to share the research with the neighborhood*
- *Work with the City to establish a way to report on problem locations, e.g., snow and vegetation blocking pedestrian ways. Educate the citizens on the City's codes and how to make a complaint if necessary.*
- *Establish a greeting committee in the neighborhood which contacts all new residents and informs them about the neighborhood association*
- *Create a neighborhood cleanup campaign for the alleys. Similar to the Adopt-A-Highway programs, the neighborhood can work together on cleaning up the alleys.*

### **Low Priorities**

1. *Develop strategies to encourage families to live in the neighborhood.*
2. *Work with the businesses on improving the appearance of the entryways into the neighborhood*

## TRANSPORTATION

### Traffic

The neighborhood's street system is in generally good condition. The neighborhood has an advantage over many other parts of the City in that there are no through streets, all of the roads end at the Animas River or Junction Creek. The neighborhood is centrally located, which makes the lack of through streets even more impressive. All neighbors only have to drive two blocks to be on Main Avenue. The neighborhood is also served by two traffic lights on Main Avenue, one on each end of the neighborhood. This allows good access into and out of the neighborhood.

Historically, the two large institutional uses in the neighborhood, Mercy and St. Columba, generated a large amount of traffic. Common complaints include speeding, the need to improve/control intersections, and parking issues. With Mercy Hospital and many of the associated medical offices moving out of the neighborhood the amount of traffic should decrease. The emergency traffic, ambulances and helicopters will also cease. Although new uses are planned in the neighborhood, these uses should generate less traffic than the historic uses.

Main Avenue is the westernmost boundary of the neighborhood. Main Avenue has an approximate average daily traffic flow of 38,000 trips. The large amount of traffic does have the potential to have a major impact on the neighborhood. However, since all of the other roads dead-end, the neighborhood is not used for short cuts or as a way to avoid Main Avenue, as commonly seen on the west side of Main. The businesses along Main Avenue typically do not generate additional traffic in the neighborhood. In general, these businesses front on Main Avenue and with a few exceptions, most notably on East Park Avenue, all of the traffic accesses directly from Main Avenue. The businesses in fact become a buffer from the Main Avenue traffic.

The neighborhood did not identify many issues dealing with traffic during the neighborhood plan meetings. The general feeling was that the traffic and parking situation in the neighborhood will be greatly improved with the hospital and medical offices relocating. However, it was expressed that the new uses allowed on the redeveloped site need to be of a lower intensity and that traffic impacts should be addressed prior to redevelopment.

### Alleys

In 1994, the neighbors feel the alleys provide a number of benefits to the community. In particular alleys allow for all of the utility lines to be in the rear, keep the trash cans out of sight, and create a physical separation from adjacent land uses. Alleys also provide a pedestrian and bike way that is out of traffic.

### Parking

Over the years the biggest issue in the neighborhood has been parking. The parking problem not only causes major inconveniences to many residents, and visitors in the neighborhood, but providing adequate parking was the impetus for the land uses changes that happened in the neighborhood.

### Pedestrian / Bike System

The 1994 plan suggested the need to improve pedestrian and bike paths throughout the City. The completion of the Animas River Trail has connected the neighborhood to this wonderful amenity. Providing a better connection through the redeveloped Mercy site is a recommendation in the plan.

### Issues:

- *Parking – Rental Units, MMC campus, church, Wendy's*
- *High school parking impacts*

- *No place for the residents to park (especially on Park)*
- *Cars blocking driveways, fire hydrants*
- *Lack of sidewalk on 21st*
- *Traffic flow problems*
  - *St. Columba School and Day Care pick-up and drop-off*
  - *Cars waiting to turn into Bank of the San Juans stacking on Park*
  - *Cars waiting to turn into Wendy's stacking on Main*
  - *U-turns at 2nd Avenue*
- *Poor snow removal on sidewalks, especially in rental units, people forced to walk in streets*
- *Pedestrian ways not maintained, cars blocking sidewalks, vegetation blocking sidewalks*
- *Lack of visibility due to cars parked on Alamo Drive for Rank Park activities*
- *Speeding*
- *Need a street light at the end of E. Park Avenue*
- *Need a cul-de-sac at the end of E. Park Avenue*
- *Need Crosswalks*
- *Move Park Avenue traffic to 20th Street*
- *Reduce traffic*
- *Install speed bumps*

Park Avenue is impacted from cars waiting to turn into the drive-thru lanes for the Bank of the San Juans. This does not appear to cause major problems in the neighborhood.

One of the neighborhood issues was to ensure that the redeveloped Mercy Site provide adequate parking to serve the new and existing uses. New uses beyond those allowed in the Planned Development should only be allowed on the site after careful review of their parking demand.

Alternative transportation systems is a major issue in the neighborhood as well as the entire City. With the problems associated with providing adequate parking, decreasing the number of cars appears to be one of the best solutions to the parking crisis. The City continues to fund the bus system which has been improved over the years. The City has also prioritized adding bike and pedestrian improvements throughout the community especially along the Animas River. The City completed the missing link in the Animas River Trail last year and now the trail connects from 32<sup>nd</sup> Street to the Durango Mall without interruption. In general, alternative transportation is a city wide issue and will be addressed as part of the Comprehensive Plan update currently underway.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **High Priority**

1. *Require a traffic impact analysis for any major development project.*
2. *Enforce City codes and educate the citizens on their responsibilities for sidewalk maintenance, including repairs, snow removal, cutting back of vegetation, parking in the right-of-way, blocking the sidewalk, etc.*
3. *Encourage the use of creative parking alternatives City-wide instead of creating more surface parking.*
4. *Work with St. Columba's School and Day Care to create adequate pick-up and drop-off areas.*
5. *Install multiple school zone signs at strategic locations.*

#### **Medium Priority**

1. *Investigate making it illegal for cars to "stack" on a public street while waiting for a drive-through. This will make the business more responsible for solving the parking problem.*

2. *Install a cul-de-sac at the end Park Avenue in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Mercy site.*
4. *Work with the City and property owners to install a sidewalk along 21st Street.*
5. *Work on encouraging the use of alternative forms of transportation.*

**Low Priority**

1. *Utilize the neighborhood organization to establish communication and promote community involvement through activities such as:
  - *Educate the neighbors on how to report traffic-sign such as obscured or missing signs.**
2. *Request routine enforcement of the parking ordinance, such as parking in front of a fire hydrant.*
3. *Continue the policy that any major reconstruction/widening project on areas designated as bike routes should include bike lanes*
4. *Continue the City's sidewalk improvement program in which the property owner and the City jointly fund sidewalk improvements on a priority system.*

## PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

There is one municipal park - Viles Park - in the neighborhood. It is a tree-shaded triangle of land bounded by East Park Avenue, East Second Avenue and East 18th Street. It has picnic and playground facilities and is enjoyed by neighborhood residents, employees and visitors alike. In addition to Viles Park, there is a City-maintained trail along the northern bank of Junction Creek and the Animas River Trail borders the eastern part of the neighborhood. There is a church owned playground on the St. Columba property.

In addition to the amenities within the neighborhood, there are facilities for recreation activities close by, including tennis courts and playing fields at the high school, walking trails and play areas through Rank Park, the Durango Recreation Center, ball fields at the La Plata County Fairgrounds the Animas River Trail and the Animas River (for tubing, rafting, kayaking and fishing).

Improvements along the Animas River identified in the 1993 neighborhood plan have been accomplished with the installation of the Animas River Trail. The construction of the trail through the neighborhood was accomplished as a joint project with the City, Durango Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad and Mercy Medical Center all working together. The creation of the Animas River Trail connects the neighborhood to other parts of the City without the need to traverse streets. The trail not only serves the residents of the neighborhood it also allows other City residents the ability to come into the neighborhood without driving which helps decrease traffic and the associated parking.

Although the creation of the Animas River Trail should have eliminated people walking along the railroad tracks, it did not and this is still a neighborhood issue. Another issue that is still unresolved in the neighborhood is people, trying to find access points to the river, end up wandering through the neighborhood and crossing private property to reach their destination. Access points to the river need to be defined.

### ISSUES:

Provide access to the Animas River Trail through the redeveloped Mercy site.

*Dog owners not cleaning up after dogs*

*The need to ensure that Junction Creek is not adversely impacted, resulting in flooding*

*Debris, especially downed wood, along Junction Creek*

*People wandering through Alamo neighborhood, looking for access to the river*

*People walking along railroad tracks*

*Transients living along railroad tracks*

Only two new issues were identified during the neighborhood meetings, the first is to provide access to the Animas River Trail through the redeveloped Mercy site, and the second is the debris, especially downed wood, along Junction Creek. Many of the issues previously identified as a part of the 1994 plan, including the appearance and maintenance of the parks and open space are no longer of concern.

The two issues that deal with Junction Creek are both concerned about potential flooding, especially with the amount of debris that has accumulated along the creek. There is still an issue with transients living along the railroad tracks.

In 1994 the issues were primarily concerned with the appearance and maintenance of the parks and open space, rather than the amount of land dedicated to those uses. The neighborhood is comparatively rich in open space and most of the appearance issues dealt with the potential loss of open space and the "greenness" that the neighborhood values. A number of the previous issues dealt with preserving the feeling and look of open space. One recommendation that is still relevant is to maintain the open space buffer around the Pingrey Annex between the parking lot and day care center and the residences on Alamo Drive. A new recommendation has been included in the plan to provide a landscaped buffer between the new structures on the redeveloped Mercy site and the Animas River.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **High Priority**

1. *Retain/maintain the open space buffer around the Pingrey Annex to separate non-residential and residential uses.*
2. *Analyze flood hazards along Junction Creek and monitor work along the creek to make sure recommendations are followed.*
3. *Maintain the trees on the Pingrey Annex hillside to preserve the buffer and overall look of the hillside.*
4. *Uniform signage program for river access points throughout the City. Educate the public and create handouts identifying public river access points. )*
5. *Provide routine bike patrols along trails throughout the City. [Also listed in Community Facilities and Services]*
6. *Have the City adopt a tree/landscape preservation ordinance.*
7. *Provide good pedestrian access to the Animas River through the redeveloped Mercy site.*
8. *Provide a landscaped buffer between new structures on the redeveloped Mercy site and the Animas River.*

### **Medium Priority**

1. *Explore the possibility of installing landscaping in the church playground/parking area.*

## HOUSING

The Alamo Drive area is the newest part of the neighborhood with primarily one story "1950's modern" style houses built in the early 1950's. This part of the neighborhood is somewhat isolated, separated from the rest of the neighborhood by a substantial grade differential. The Alamo homes lie in the valley along Junction Creek.

The remainder of the neighborhood consists of older 1 1/2 to 2 story homes, largely "late western Victorian" in style. Several of the homes have been converted to duplexes; however, the majority of the homes have been maintained as single-family homes.

Boarded up houses in the neighborhood was an issues identified in the 1994 plan. At that time there were two boarded up single-family homes in the neighborhood; one on Alamo Drive and one on East Park Avenue. The house on Alamo was fixed up and is occupied. The house on Park was just recently demolished. The presence of boarded up houses is no longer a concern in the neighborhood.

The homes and gardens throughout the neighborhood reflect considerable caring on the part of their owners. Smaller homes have been expanded over the years, reflecting a trend of investing in the neighborhood.

The housing market in Durango is very healthy, with homes quickly selling for a good price. This healthy sellers market has caused prices to increase throughout the City and the county and affordable housing is hard to find. Providing affordable housing and maintaining the quality of the housing stock is a community wide issue and will be addressed as part of the City's Comprehensive Plan. There were several housing issues identified.

### ISSUES:

*Loss of single family houses on E. Third Avenue*

*Loss of residential units*

*Rental properties that are not maintained*

*Maintain a mix of housing stock*

*Property maintenance*

The major housing issue identified in 1994 was the loss of residential units in the neighborhood. Over the years houses were being bought up and replaced by undesirable uses. The loss of residential units is two fold. One is the loss of the structure and the neighborhood look. The second is the loss of residents and the neighborhood feel. Both were major issues in the neighborhood in 1994.

Over the last 20 years, five houses were demolished or moved out of the neighborhood on East Third Avenue to allow the parking lot for the hospital to be constructed. In addition, the single-family home on the Pingrey Annex was turned into a day care for the Mercy employees and a single-family home on East Second Avenue was converted into the Mercy Manor then into a residence for the helicopter flight crew.

The day care center on the Pingrey Annex will probably continue for the time being, although it will no longer be owned or operated by Mercy. The City of Durango is considering the lease of the property to a day care provider. Recently several of the houses that became other uses on E. 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue (Mercy Manor and a medical office) have been converted back to single-family residential uses. The neighbors are encouraged by this trend and are happy to have new residents in their neighborhood.

The Land Use and Zoning section dealt with these issues and the associated recommendations can be found at the end of that section.

The condition of rental units was identified as an issue in 1994 and it is still an issue today.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

## **Medium Priority**

- 1. Encourage the City to adopt standards that address health and safety issues in residential properties*
- 2. Strengthen the code to make landlords responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of their properties, including snow removal.*
- 3. Strengthen the code on property maintenance*
- 4. Encourage owner-occupied residences.*
- 5. Change the definition of household to decrease the number of unrelated people who are allowed to live in one unit.*
- 6. Maintain a housing mix, including smaller affordable units.*

## **PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

The neighborhood's infrastructure of streets, water, sewer and storm drainage systems is generally in good condition. No issues involving public facilities were identified at the neighborhood meetings. The only public service issues identified involved routine patrols for the bike path and the neighborhood.

### **Water and Sewer Service**

The water and sewer improvements that were identified in the 1994 Plan have all been complete. The overall systems are in good shape and there are no new issues or recommendations involving water or sewer service.

### **Storm Drainage**

According to the 1994 neighborhood plan, the only storm drainage recommendation for the neighborhood in the 1982 "Urban Storm Drainage Master Plan" for Durango was that storm sewers be placed from Main to East Second along East Park, along East Second and 18th to the north side of Viles Park, and from the lower end of Alamo Drive to the River. This work is still needed, but has not been scheduled.

### **Street Maintenance**

Street maintenance was not identified as a problem during the neighborhood meetings. Overall, the streets in the neighborhood are well maintained. .

### **Safety Issues:**

- Speeding
- Lack of police presence
- Vandalism
- Need for better animal control

Four issues were identified during the neighborhood meetings: speeding, the lack of a police presence, vandalism and the need for better animal control. The second issue, lack of police presence, was actually discussed in the context of the first issue, speeding as well as the need for bike patrols along the Animas River Trail.

In the 1994 plan the neighbors stated that they should become proactive in crime prevention and recommended a neighborhood watch program. Although in reality, in this neighborhood the residents already look out for one another, pay attention to what's going on, and in essence have a successful informal neighborhood watch program.

In all, the desire to have more routine police patrols is associated with the enforcement of the speed limits, rather than a feeling of not being safe. The other recommendations developed were a means to be proactive to maintain that feeling of safety.

The need for better animal control is a City wide issue and the City is currently revising the animal regulations and has recently increased enforcement efforts.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **High Priority**

1. Establish/reinforce a neighborhood watch program to educate citizens in crime prevention strategies.
2. More routine patrols in the neighborhood by the Police Department, especially the speed limits.

3. Routine bike patrols by the Police Department along the trail system throughout the City.  
**[Also listed in Parks, Recreation and Open Space]**
4. Increase night patrol by the Police Department along the trail.