



Santa Fe REALTORS® Help Bring New Life – and Housing – to “Tired” Commercial Area

Within the city of Santa Fe, connecting two main thoroughfares and conveniently served by the Rail Runner commuter line to Albuquerque, the mile-and-a-quarter stretch known as the St. Michael’s corridor enjoys a prime location. Anchored by the Santa Fe University of Art and Design at one end and Christus St. Vincent Hospital at the other, this *could* be a thriving urban environment. As it now stands, however, with a dated suburban-style commercial layout dominated by acres of storefront parking lots and six underutilized traffic lanes – and with precious little housing – the St. Michael’s corridor presents a pretty dismal view.

But its future is looking brighter.

Thanks to a Smart Growth Action Grant from the National Association of REALTORS®, the Santa Fe Association of REALTORS® [SFAR] has been able to boost the re-development of the St. Michael’s corridor by commissioning a Housing Advocacy Study that proposes a vibrant new design for the area -- including up to one thousand housing units. In February, the Santa Fe City Council embraced the plan by passing a resolution that keeps the St. Michael’s redevelopment project moving forward.

“This has been a great collaboration between the city of Santa Fe and the local REALTORS®,” says Reed Liming, Long Range Planning Division Director of the city’s Housing & Community Development Department, “especially as we are two groups that have not always been on the same page on all issues in the past. The nice thing about the grant from the National Association is that it allowed the local REALTORS® to choose their own consultant to conduct this valuable study, so that it wasn’t city-controlled. I was glad they commissioned Al Moore to do it, and the proposal he presented shows us an exciting and achievable long-range future for St. Michael’s.”

Al Moore is an architect who has been practicing urban design for forty years. In 2009, he was one of a handful of experts who were asked to submit initial ideas to the city as it first identified the area as a potential target for redevelopment. Two years later, when SFAR asked him to undertake its Housing Advocacy Study, he came out of retirement to do so. “It was impossible to refuse,” he says. “Our urban environments ought to be places that are fabulous places to live, work, and recreate. The experience of urban living should be exciting, thriving, and safe.”

His recommendations focus on creating an attractive pedestrian zone that is economically viable, in order to retain the area’s young people and draw a vibrant new population. The comprehensive plan involves changing the built environment by reducing the traffic lanes and enlivening the mile-plus stretch with mixed-use buildings that enhance, rather than discourage, the pedestrian experience. It takes into account the existing economic engines flanking the St. Michael’s corridor – the University and the Hospital – and adds another hub of culture and industry at the center of the corridor, at the site of the Rail Runner station. It includes student housing for the University, and

ample housing and jobs to make staying in Santa Fe a good option for its younger citizens.

To kick-off the St. Michael's corridor project, with the help of the NAR grant, SFAR hosted a lively presentation on "The Future of the U.S. Housing Market - Impacts on Santa Fe and other Cities" by Dr. Arthur C. Nelson, FAICP. Dr. Nelson is Presidential Professor of City & Metropolitan Planning and Director of the Metropolitan Research Center at the University of Utah. SFAR also hosted a number of meetings with local stakeholder groups, to assist Moore in formulating a plan that considers the broadest possible range of interests.

Donna Reynolds, SFAR's former Association Executive who proposed the study to the city, commissioned it, and remains closely involved with the project, says "If we can make this happen, we will have a lot to be proud of." Having helped jump-start this promising future for the St. Michael's Drive corridor, SFAR will continue to be a part of the process, she notes. A number of its members will serve on a work group the City Council is establishing to stimulate redevelopment progress.

And while Moore points out that such an ambitious project may be twenty-to-thirty years in the making, the 700 members of the Santa Fe Association of REALTORS® know that securing the long-range health and happiness of the community is a job worth doing.



From left to right: Santa Fe Mayor David Coss; Al Moore (consultant); Paco Arguello (SFAR Chief Executive); Councilors Rosemary Romero and Rebecca Wurzbarger; Victoria Murphy (SFAR President-Elect)