

DOWNTOWN

When you're alone and life is making you lonely,
You can always go Downtown.
When you've got worries, all the noise and hurry
Seem to help, I know. Downtown.
Just listen to the music of the traffic in the city.
Linger on the sidewalk where the neon signs are pretty.
How can you lose? The lights are much brighter there;
You can forget your troubles, forget your cares.
Go go Downtown. Things'll be great when you're Downtown.
No finer place for sure, Downtown
Everything's waiting for you Downtown.

Don't hang around and let your problems surround you;
There are movie shows, Downtown.
Maybe you know some little places to go to
Where they never close, Downtown.
Just listen to the rhythm of the gentle Bossa Nova.
You'll be dancing with 'em too before the night is over,
Happy again. The lights are much brighter there;
You can forget your troubles, forget your cares.
Go go Downtown where all the lights are bright, Downtown,
Waiting for you tonight, Downtown.
You're gonna be all right now Downtown.

Don't hang around and let your problems surround you;
There are movie shows, Downtown.
Maybe you know some little places to go to
Where they never close, Downtown.
And you may find somebody kind to help and understand you
Someone who is just like you and needs a gentle hand
To guide them along. So maybe I'll see you there.
We can forget our troubles, forget our cares.
Go go Downtown. Things will be great when you're Downtown.
Don't wait a minute more. Downtown.
Everything's waiting for you, Downtown.





A current popular song, written by Tony Hatch and published by Leeds Music Company, introduces this article about the largest downtown in New Mexico. The central core of Albuquerque is not what it should or could be. What can be done to put things right?

ALBUQUERQUE - DOWNTOWN



"Everything is better when you're downtown" provokes a smile, doesn't it? And if it suggests yesteryear, it is also faintly nostalgic, for it conjours up an awareness of something good which has been lost. The old-fashioned downtown provided a festive environment which somehow invested events that took place there with a special significance. Downtown was the ceremonial as well as the commercial center of the community. Even in small towns, events that took place here did indeed take on a meaning and importance that they would have lacked in the suburbs.

During the last twenty years our modern cities have somehow tended to lose that important core which traditionally provided the focus and center of urban life. Still more recently, however, the devastating effects of a center-less urban sprawl have begun to be noticed by architects, sociologists, and other people of perceptive awareness. Today, plans are afoot and projects have begun to appear which will counteract the flight from the downtown.

In Albuquerque an organization known as Albuquerque-Downtown has been created which coordinates efforts of city government, downtown merchants, and local architects to revitalize the old downtown. *Albuquerque-Downtown* is alerting the entire city to the problems and importance of a vital core area, and it is developing methods for implementing this rejuvenation.

Consciously aware of the dangers of remote and utopian plans, no matter how beautifully designed, *Albuquerque-Downtown* is looking for practical solutions and grass roots support. Several original and fruitful approaches to the problem of planning have been evolved. One method of operation which is proving successful is a series of "skull sessions" between *Albuquerque-Downtown* staff and anyone interested in seriously discussing the planning problem. As of this writing, over one hundred people have spent considerable amounts of time with the technical staff. The interests of these people range from political science and sociology,

A l b u q u e r q u e T o d a y



Nostalgia — but becoming a blighted area.



A new City Hall and a new County Building situated together, but separated by a parking lot.



A bit of 1920 romantic revival. A gleaming white Gothic office building . . .



. . . and an Indian-Aztec movie house

And there ARE people . . .
but on a hot shadeless sidewalk



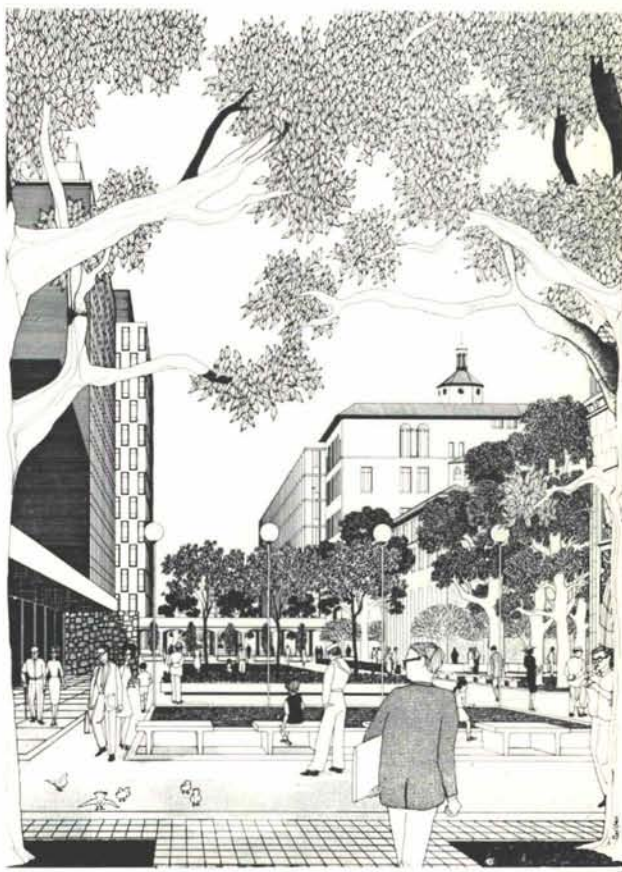
as in the case of several professors from the University of New Mexico, to traffic engineering and marketing. Official organizations such as the Urban Planning Committee of the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Special Property Owners' Advisory Committee, the Design Review Group, and the New Mexico Association of Planners have all contributed significantly to an understanding of the best avenue to pursue. Secondly, in a positive move to reverse the tendency that is all too prevalent in America today to employ "outside experts," the Albuquerque Metropolitan Development Committee, a group of civic leaders appointed by the City Commission, required that the designers charged with plans for the new downtown core be local practitioners. It also required that full use be made of data which had already been gathered or prepared by the City Planning Department. Since time is of the essence, there is an obvious advantage in having a technical staff which, being "on the spot" can continue to work toward ever better planning solutions at the same time that the plan is being explained to the public and early stages of work implemented.

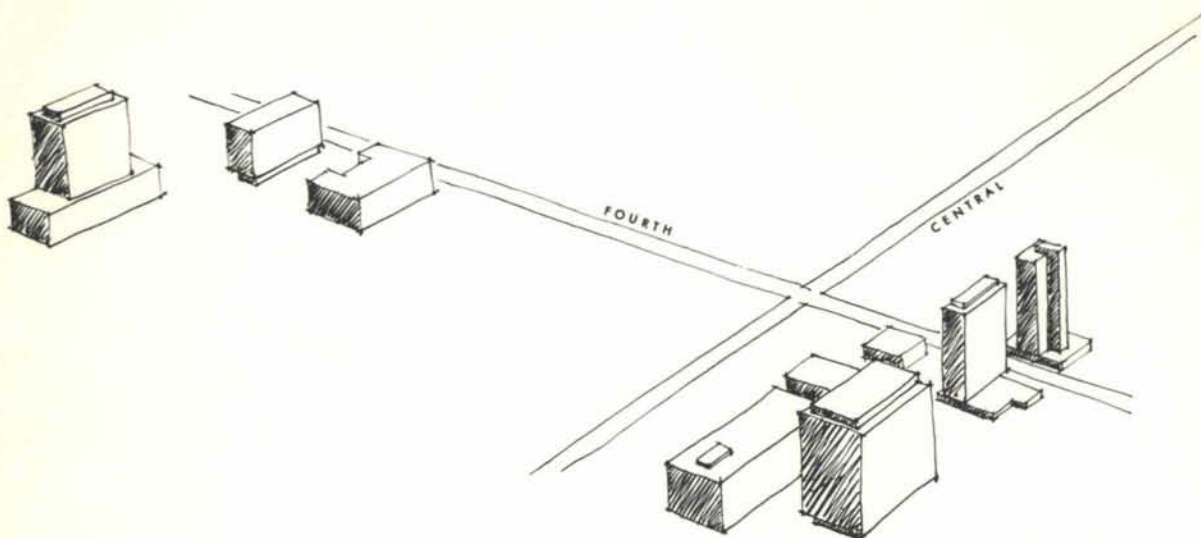
"Why have a downtown?" This often-posed question is a complicated one to answer because the issues involved concern a way of life. It is a very personal matter. Normally, we do not argue about cities; we simply accept them. The obvious increase in the number of city dwellers indicates that we approve of cities. We settle in or near a city to obtain a job, to send children to school, to receive police and fire protection, and to shop conveniently. We take cities so much as a matter of course that we seldom stop to ask ourselves what the city does or should contain and provide.

Arguments for a downtown should be made along the lines of the relationship of a downtown to all areas other than downtown, what a city needs in order to more than barely survive, and where these things should be located. With the use of the automobile, it is possible to have a branch of almost everything. But where is the trunk which supports these branches? We have branch banks, stores, telephone exchanges, and the like, but their main offices, the "trunks" are in one place; by tradition and because of economy and convenience, they are downtown. Where are our branch natural, historical and anthropological museums, our branch repertory theatre, our branch concert hall? Most cities cannot afford them. As a matter of fact, we in Albuquerque do not seem to want to provide even these main institutions for ourselves. But let us be theoretical and say that we did, if only for our children. Then where should these main institutions be located? By tradition and because of economy and convenience, they must be downtown.

We have become disillusioned with our downtown. The reason is simple. Historically, the major

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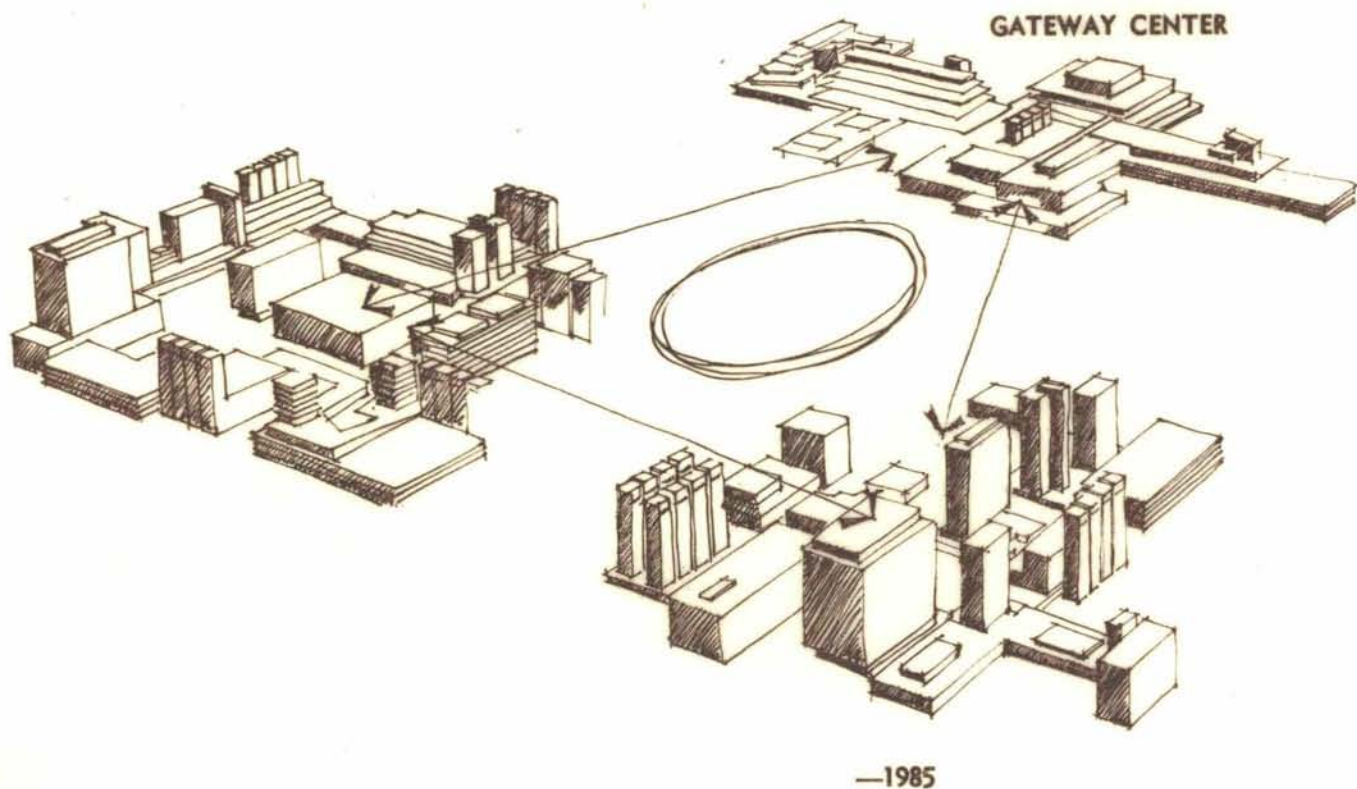
CITY, COUNTY, STATE CENTER

ACTIVITY CENTERS — 1965

FEDERAL CENTER

THE
NEW ALBUQUERQUE
DOWNTOWN AREA
— 1985





NORTH 

CITY, COUNTY STATE CENTER

CENTRAL AVENUE

GATEWAY CENTER

FEDERAL CENTER

ALVARADO HOTEL

land use of a city was commercial or retailing. Other activities grouped around the stores. Then, spurred on by the automobile, low interest loans and tax advantages, the vast low-density housing areas emerged on the periphery of the core, and the retail stores soon moved to the center of these areas, creating a new building type — the regional shopping center. Downtowns could not compete with these new clean facilities. Downtowns, therefore, began the slow deterioration process which has left them in need of repair and renewal.

Albuquerque-Downtown is a private planning organization with technical staff. Created at the suggestion of the Urban Planning Committee of the Albuquerque Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and sponsored by the Albuquerque Metropolitan Development Committee (AMDEC) as well as the Albuquerque City Commission, in November of 1964, the purpose of *Albuquerque-Downtown* is to prepare a comprehensive long-range plan for the development of the core area together with suggestions for implementing it. The completion date for the initial phase, the preparation of the plan, is scheduled for January, 1966. Staff members are Ronn Ginn, AIA, Supervising Architect; Charles Quinlan, AIA, Coordinating Architect; Maria Blachut, Senior Planner; Jack Barkley, Designer; Joe Ehardt and Eugene Bebermeyer, draftsmen (part-time) from the Department of Architecture, UNM; and Rosemary Winkler, Executive Secretary. Financial responsibility for *Albuquerque-Downtown* is assumed by the downtown property owners via assessment on a fair-share basis supervised by AMDEC. The salaries of the Senior Planner and the Executive Secretary as well as office expenses are defrayed by the City of Albuquerque.

Development of the core plan was begun by a detailed review and evaluation of existing information. Noted was the sizeable investment which already existed in public utilities, property improvements, acquisition of rights-of-way, and the like. Two years ago, the *Downtown Association*, an organization of businessmen, with the advice of the AIA's Urban Planning Committee, sponsored the construction of an accurate "as-is" model of the core area. The *Albuquerque-Downtown* staff applied standard architectural criteria to all buildings in the core area and, for reason of structural or functional inadequacies, removed many buildings from the model. Once this was done, a pattern of "activity generators" emerged. An activity generator is an area, which by virtue of its location and complex of buildings, has the ability to continue to grow and exert influence on its surroundings. Albuquerque's core has two such activity generators: One, on the north edge, is composed of the Municipal Office Building, the Bernalillo County Court House, and the soon to be completed State Office Building. This area has been named the Metropolitan Center. The second, directly to the south, is the Federal Center.

This generator is made up of the federal buildings, the Simms Building and the Bank of New Mexico Building. Surrounding both these building complexes are support facilities which consist of restaurants, smaller office buildings, parking facilities, automotive service stations and the like.

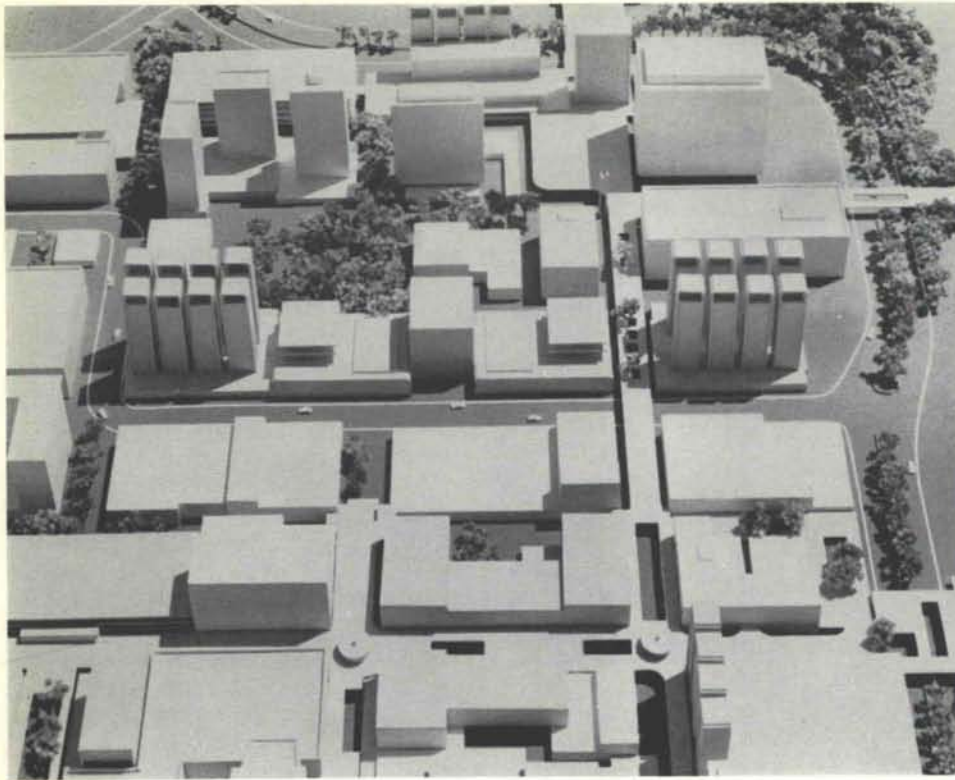
The proposal for the core development, which is to be completed by 1985, calls for the phased development of a third activity generator. To be known as the Gateway Center, this complex will be comprised of a convention center and display area, parking facilities, railroad passenger accommodations, facilities for local and interstate buses, helicopter service to the Sunport, a major hotel, and a new YMCA for the benefit of the downtown worker. The purpose of the location of this new center in terms of long-range planning is two-fold: Adjacent to and partially over the Santa Fe Railroad tracks, it serves to eradicate the visual and growth barrier created by the tracks themselves; secondly, its location in relation to the Metropolitan and Federal Centers establishes a growth potential. Retail stores, provided primarily for people who work downtown in one of the three activity generating centers, will occupy the triangular zone between the three areas. Here we are recognizing that commercial activity in the core area will never again serve in its historic role as the prime activity generator, and that it will thrive as an adjunct to and by virtue of its location between other generators.

As urbanites, we have placed few demands upon our city. Whether caused by general apathy, television or our so-called troubled times, we have seen fit to defeat bond issues for an art museum, failed to provide adequate housing for the Albuquerque Symphony, failed to provide even mediocre facilities for our libraries, and have given only token support to our legitimate theatre. In other words, Albuquerque is one of many cities where both the spirit and the substance of the "great society" have gone unnoticed.

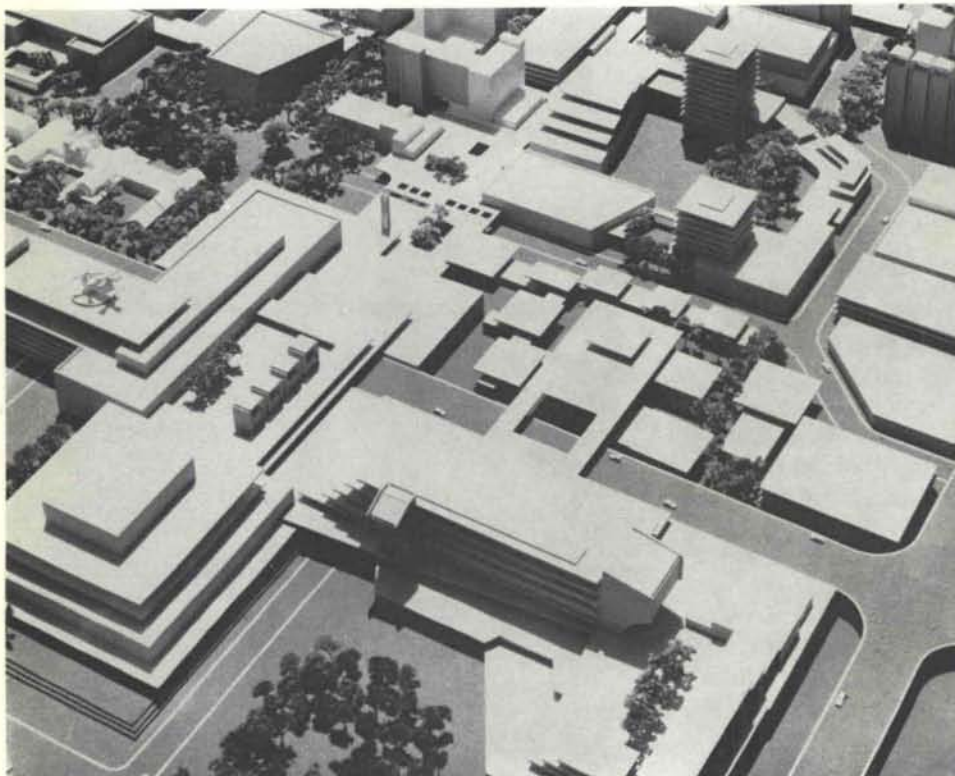
The proposal by *Albuquerque-Downtown* for core development and the support it has thus far received do suggest that an awakening is taking place. Albuquerque has begun to be aware of the financial advantages as well as the true amenities of a city. The location for the phased development of a cultural area is in the general vicinity of Gold Avenue extending from the Gateway Center to the Federal Center.

With the gradual development of these centers and the subsequent revitalization of retail trade it would not take real property developers long to recognize the market potential in housing facilities around and even within the core. As families move toward the center once again, downtown would go off the "eight-to-five" schedule.

"Pilot Projects" are small portions of an overall plan which, because of their size and location, can



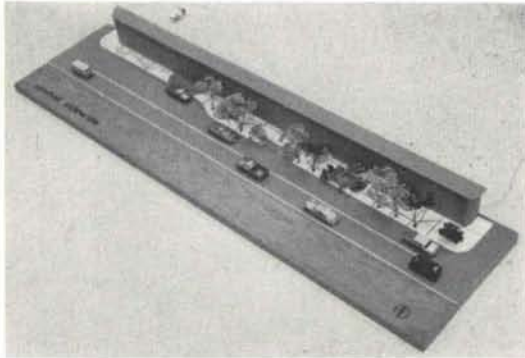
The Federal Center includes the newest Federal Office Building, which is pictured here in the extreme upper right corner, the Simms Building, and the Bank of New Mexico Building. Indicated also on the model are the high-speed peripheral road system which serves the entire core area and the tower automatic parking structures.



The Gateway Center, located adjacent to the Santa Fe Railroad tracks, includes transportation facilities for the railroad, municipal and inter-state buses, and helicopter service to Albuquerque's airport. Also included within the center are convention facilities, a new major hotel, and multi-story parking structures. The existing Alvarado Hotel is to remain and can be seen in the upper left corner of the picture. The Gateway Center forms not only an "activity generator" in itself, but it creates a tie to the west with the existing core area.

Photographs of the models
by Dick Kent

be started and actually completed while the larger plan is still being evolved. The attention-getting qualities of a pilot project are obvious. Albuquerque has already completed one pilot project called the "Sidewide," and it has gained national attention. A



sidewide is essentially the widening of a sidewalk into the street, thereby occupying space formerly devoted to a line of parked automobiles. Plans for the beautification project were prepared by Jose Luis Yguado, landscape architect, and were concerned with the north side of Central Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets. The original idea for the "Sidewide" was suggested by John Harvey, an architectural student at UNM and it called for various color and textural changes in the walking surface, various kinds of planting areas and benches. Detailed by Yguado, built by the City of Albuquerque personnel with material purchased by the adjacent property owners, the "Sidewide" is one part of downtown which is pointed to with pride by the entire city. One unique feature of the plan was the inclusion of a kiosk, or small decorative stand. Designed by the *Albuquerque - Downtown* staff, the kiosk is used by the merchants for advertisement posters.



Another pilot project in the planning stage is "Gold Concourse." This project calls for the closing of Gold Avenue between the two newest federal buildings and the installation of trees, benches, and a pool. This plan was prepared by the *Albuquerque-Downtown* staff, and liaison work with the federal government is being handled by a private architect, Mr. Max Flatow, AIA. Several more projects are in the early planning stages and are being coordinated by Architect Peggy Hooker, AIA.

Albuquerque-Downtown, in its proposal for the core, is suggesting the location of a rapid transportation system — this system to be realized perhaps ten to twenty years hence. Case histories have proven that such a transit system cannot economically function unless terminals can be located in the

center of a densely-populated area. As part of its planning and implementation job, AD is working with the Governor's Committee on Annexation under the direction of Mel Eaves and with the State Department of Planning in efforts to gain the legislative power to create a regional planning authority. Such an authority could aid in the implementation of the downtown plan.

Regional planning is of vital interest to *Albuquerque-Downtown* because of the relationship of the core to the supporting communities to the north and south. No legislative power exists today to create a regional planning authority in the State of New Mexico, but its need will soon become apparent. In the Albuquerque area, such an authority would establish major land uses and would recommend population densities over a three-county area stretching from Algodones to Belen and from Route 10 to the Rio Puerco.

Success of this first comprehensive planning program for Albuquerque is virtually guaranteed for a number of reasons. Probably most important is the fact that it can be conclusively proven that renewal efforts reap financial benefits. Many cities, some the size of Albuquerque or smaller, have preceded our efforts with successful projects of their own. Federal urban renewal and matching local funds were used in most cases. In this situation, the federal government, in order to anticipate future increased tax revenues, invests in a city by providing up to two-thirds of the land acquisition costs for a project. It seems to make good business sense on the part of the government to protect its existing investments in Albuquerque (roads, public utilities, libraries, transportation system, planning grants, environmental health, education facilities) by further participation with the taxpayers and businessmen in the costs of land acquisition for parks, public facilities and private development.

The lethargy of the past generation has been costly, both in terms of dollars and culture. We are preparing now to live more handsomely and enjoy the amenities of urban life.

Charles W. Quinlan, AIA, Coordinating Architect



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