

MetroABQ Real Estate Newsletter



Published by Chris Lucas, Albuquerque Realtor for 19 years, & loving it...

<Late Winter>

Filling in the Spaces: MetroABQ Infill

The Scottish Rite Building in Photos



Filling in the spaces...

Infill development is essential for healthy, growing cities. Simply, infill helps strengthen the city core: it allows for dilapidated buildings to benefit from new uses, vacant/run-down lots to transform into healthy neighborhood additions, & allows more residents to live in dividable lots--all while adding to the local tax base. Obviously positive stuff.

Luckily, the MetroABQ is one of those growing cities, & we're filling in the empty spaces in numerous healthy ways.

Above: behind "Bumblebee the Transformer" & the pink jewelry store on Lomas Blvd, sits the former Wells Fargo Building, that was [a vibrant green focal Downtown landmark](#), but has seen better days. As economies shift & populations expand, contract or adjust, the 13-floor skyscraper--renamed Lomas Tower--will adjust too, creating perhaps 100 new residential living apartments. It's a start; more are on the way...



As with all mid-sized US cities, the MetroABQ has a large unhoused issue. It was estimated that we need well over 5000 new dwellings to accommodate the current lack of housing.

A few miles to the east, standing tall on the edge of the International District, is another famous edifice, the Bank of the West Tower, one of two skyscrapers on the block-long property, above. Completed in 1963 & designed by renowned ABQ architecture firm [Flatow](#), Moore, Bryan, & Fairburn, it doesn't need a Transformer in the foreground to draw your attention.

Once completed, one of the city's tallest buildings will be called Park Central & will offer about 100 mixed income residential apartments. The south tower, also on the lot, will be transformed at some future date.

For a bunch of years pre-Covid, MetroABQ planners realized that they needed to

pivot the zoning to catch up with current circumstances. Both the Lomas Tower & Park Central will be able to transform from commercial office spaces into residential apartments because of that foresight. Both will greatly transform the areas/neighborhoods around them so they are contributing to the health of the city, instead of remaining vacant sore-spots.



Another large-scale infill project, this one in the Near North Valley, started over a year ago & is almost complete. [Griegos Farm](#) includes 90 stand-alone one-&-two bedroom 'cottages', filling in close to ten acres of what used to be the grounds of a church. The above image was taken walking the grounds early on; all the outdoor spaces are public, the cottages are rented.

This type of infill project seems to fill an expected demand for space: aging Boomers, single people & younger renters/buyers leaving the nest will gravitate to the smaller residences. Mid-range priced infill projects like this one will be a big draw.



Medium-scale infill. There are many vacant/underutilized lots scattered across the city that are well-suited for mid-size infill projects. They may include entire blocks or half-blocks, like the Wellesley & Silver Apartments project.

Until recently, behind tall privacy walls in a section of Nob Hill, sat the surprisingly discreet 100-year-old Bachechi compound, with [Spanish-Pueblo Revival structures](#) that clearly [had seen better times](#).

The half-block compound has been re-envisioned into 40 "pueblo-style" apartments; the image above & plat map below are from the Nob Hill adjacent & sustainable concepts [Design Group](#) architecture team.

A recent client of mine commented to [KRQE.com](#) about the project: "You know, it's mostly an abandoned property. It does attract a lot of critters. We get a lot of

raccoons on the property, a lot of birds," said Paul Dickson, a neighbor. "I did attend the demolition meeting & some of the [photos were kind of terrible](#). The outbuildings are all a big mess & falling down...(The project) looks good! I hope that it ends up looking like the designs...You know, I'm a big fan of infill & I'm not going to be [a nimby](#) & say, 'can't do it on my block!' So, I think it's a much better use. I think it's good for the neighborhood," said Dickson.

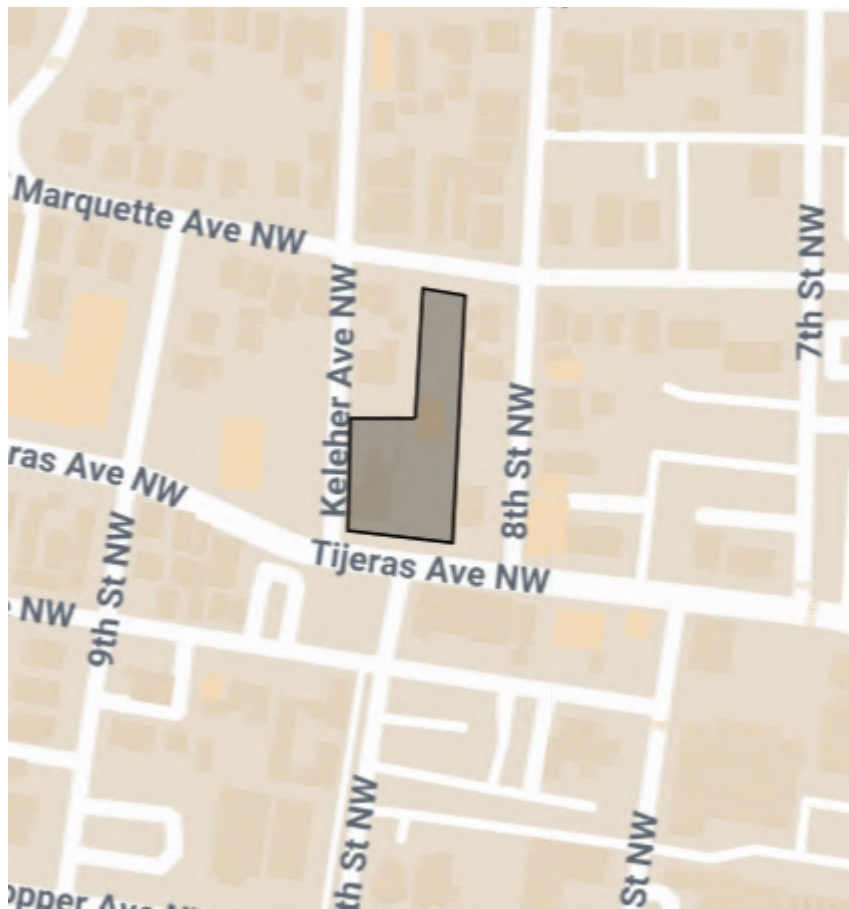
From a design standpoint, it's easy to appreciate that the entry for the parking is at the back of the complex & the parking lot is generally hidden from the street, with the building fronts facing the public sidewalk areas, seen below. The proposed buildings are also a style seen in the historic neighborhood, but with contemporary touches.





Somewhat smaller projects help fill in the valuable spaces with more residences too, & are just as beneficial for the city. The multi-unit project above is being constructed on North Fourth St, just south of Ranchos de Albuquerque. Below is another infill project in the UNM area.





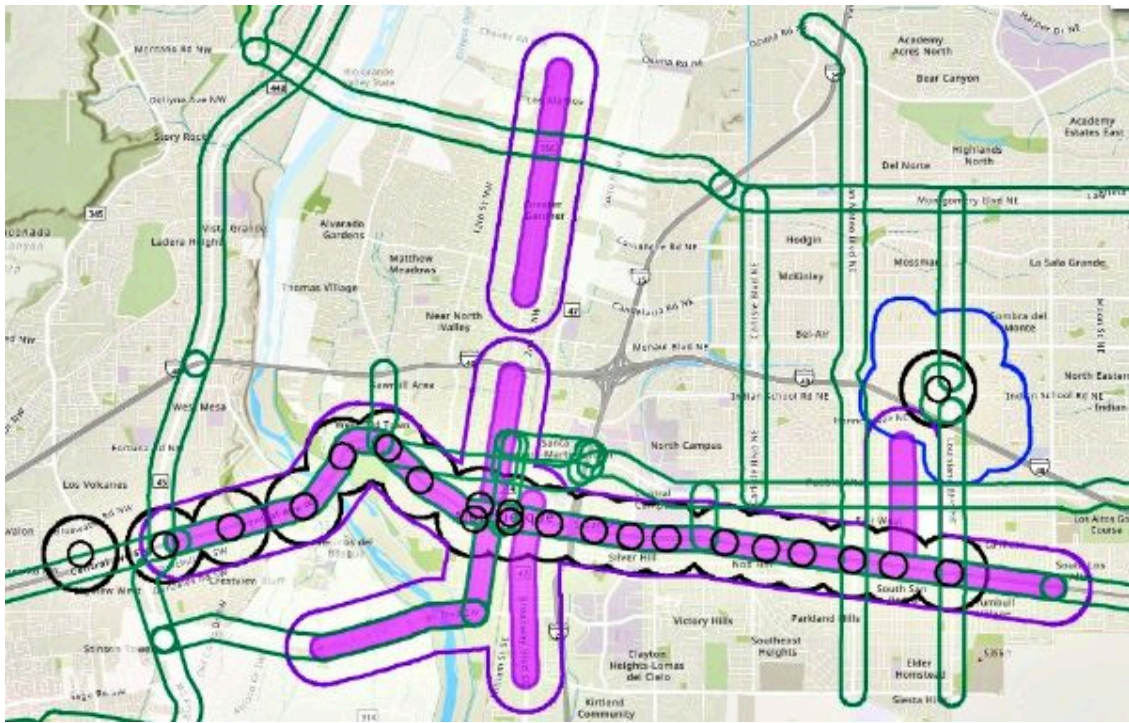
Small-Scale Infill. Zoning rules allow for more density in already developed but under-utilized lots. A good example is the Keleher House Downtown, above (image from [DAN](#)). Built in the 1880's, the home has a large under-used parking area in the front & back; the house is below.

From [DAN](#) (November 10, '25): Mark Baker, the man behind the redevelopment of the 505 Central Food Hall, owns both (lots) as of last week. He plans to convert the original home, which has been vacant for some time but was last used as an office, into a duplex. The other building...is set to become eight apartments - a mix of one, two & three-bedroom units...A devoted urbanist, he noted last week that the redevelopment will at once fill two vacant buildings, add much-needed housing, & contribute foot traffic to one of the more promising corners of Downtown.



What do all these infill places have in common? They exist in higher density corridors where a large percentage of people live & work: the University area, Nob Hill, Downtown, the North Fourth corridor & along large sections of the 16-mile stretch of Central Ave/Rt 66. Other corridors with higher-density are offshoots from that.

The map below shows the areas where most of the infill is taking place. The areas of the city not in purple or green consist more of single-family homes with more space & less density.



A shoutout to [Downtown Albuquerque News \(DAN\)](#), which has been diligently covering the Pro-Urban-Density movement since its inception, & thoughtfully describes the "Old Guard" views as well.

An excellent article about the recent ABQ City Council land use rule changes boiled it all down nicely. A sample paragraph from the DAN February 23rd edition:

The City Council concluded its biennial marathon of land use rule changes last week ([DAN, 2/17/26](#)) by delivering a classic half-a-loaf result to Albuquerque's fledgling pro-density reform movement: The loosely organized coalition of community groups, affordability advocates, & builders notched several quiet victories that will make it easier to fit more housing units into less space - particularly on major corridors - but lost a high-profile fight over what people are allowed to do with their single-family-zone properties. Opponents of such density, meanwhile, breathed a sigh of relief. They had worried that allowing more duplexes & triplexes (plus bigger casitas) in single-family home areas would damage the character of established neighborhoods without actually building much in the way of new affordable housing.

From December 27th, '24: The new higher residential density would be allowed within a quarter-mile of ART stations (the black, circular, and often overlapping shapes on the map) & specially designated "Main Street" corridors (purple border). While both zones exist in other parts of the city ([map](#)), the concentration is greatest in the city center area.

The DAN e-newsletter is tossed into my inbox each weekday morning like clockwork, often before the break of dawn & is always the first news read.



Unfill. Sometimes a location is better with less infill & more greenspace. On the CNM Main Campus, for example, decades ago, another building was practically built over the top of the historic Louis Saavedra Administration Building, above, which was originally built in 1923 as the University Heights Elementary School.

CNM recently removed the offending building & created a xeriscaped park space all around the LS Admin Building. The area feels sparse now; however, there were at least 20 trees & shrubs added, plus walkways, & a unique concrete bench, below. Give it a few years to fill out...



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& they will be added to the [MetroABQ mailing list](#).



Moorish Revival Architecture Tour

The Scottish Rite Center in Santa Fe demands that you pay attention to it as you pass by. The bold Moorish-influenced arches & impressive window designs are not seen much outside the [Western Islamic lands](#). The Scottish Rite was based on the design of the [Alhambra in Granada](#), Spain, which was the historic epicenter of the Moors, whose empire spanned almost 800 years...

Yet 5,500 miles away, & less than an hour north of the MetroABQ, sits a stunning century-old pink-stuccoed Moorish Revival-style complex, uniquely located in the Southwest...

Moorish architecture includes features like horseshoe & scalloped arches, elaborate repeating [geometric](#) patterns & [arabesque](#) motifs in wood, stucco, & tile. All of these are incorporated into the exterior & interior architecture of the Santa Fe complex.









Moor Windows

Most impressive are the many stylized window designs, specifically the rounded, horseshoe-shaped curve above the main window, that narrows around the base, seen above & throughout the complex, even found in [an office room](#).

Numerous & unique arches also decorate most doorways, like the restroom directly below, which is honored with a nice detailed arch design.









Arabesque patterns adorn numerous walls in the complex; think intricately carved wood 'wallpaper.'



The Complex includes an almost 350-seat theatre, with Moorish designs in the columns & as part of the walls; notice the cloudy sky ceiling.

The balcony holds over 100 seats & features sublime [arabesque panels between stained glass windows](#) on two sides.

Backstage, there are more than 80 set designs, all stored using a rope-pulley system to raise or [lower each one as needed](#).









It's not a theatre without costumes...In the lower level of the complex, dozens of wooden wall racks hold hundreds of costumes & accessories for future occasions.



THE CREED OF SCOTTISH RITE FREEMASONS

THE CAUSE OF HUMAN PROGRESS IS OUR CAUSE. ENFRANCHISEMENT OF HUMAN THOUGHT
OUR SUPREME WISH. THE FREEDOM OF HUMAN CONSCIENCE OUR MISSION. AND THE
GUARANTEE OF EQUAL RIGHTS TO ALL PEOPLES EVERYWHERE. THE END OF OUR
CONTENTION.

[Wikipedia](#) describes the current usage of the Scottish Rite Center as that of a "clubhouse", which is probably accurate. The operating group of [Freemasons](#) describes part of their mission as "the guarantee of equal rights to all peoples everywhere," which is a noble pursuit & bears this mention. Additionally, the benevolent organization has kept the building in pristine condition since 1912, so thanks also for that...

A hearty Thank You to the Historic Santa Fe Foundation for organizing the tour
& to the Scottish Rite Freemasons for guiding the group.



Italian Murano glass was used to create the chandeliers in the banquet hall...



Moorish-inspired architecture almost always includes a centrally-located, private courtyard with gardens, seen above at the Santa Fe Scottish Rite. The image was taken from inside the banquet hall; the dangling lightbulb in the top corner is from a string of lights outside...



Thank you for making it this far...



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I am a dedicated seven-days-a-week real estate professional, representing clients for over 17 years-- I love this city!

I continuously seek out the hidden gems at any price-point for my Buyers, & am a tireless promoter for all of my Sellers' listings. I love talking real estate.

Chris Lucas

Owner/Broker

505.463.5317

ChrisLucasABQ.com
jebalucas@gmail.com



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Mailing address:

Chris Lucas Real Estate

PO Box 40081

Albuquerque, NM 87196

To reach Chris, call or text: 505.463.5317

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