

PIÑON HILLS BOULEVARD
CORRIDOR PLAN

(DRAFT)

August 12, 2002

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of the Piñon Hills Boulevard Corridor Plan is to provide a guideline for future land use decisions along the corridor. Upon formal selection of a Plan option by the City Council, the plan will guide future decisions about the corridor--most importantly, requests for zone changes. The corridor under review extends approximately 6.3 miles from the PHB intersection with the La Plata Highway, east to the intersection of PHB and East Main Street, State Hwy. 516. The Plan will also serve to enunciate and provide greater detail to the comprehensive plan for this territory as reflected in the (draft) 2020 Farmington Comprehensive Plan--Framing the Future.

The Plan will focus primarily on territory lying within one-quarter mile, approximately 1,300 feet, of the PHB 120-foot wide right-of-way. The exact plan area coverage varies slightly from this quarter-mile standard where land status patterns (private, state or BLM) or where property lines dictate a change to ensure a reasonable and practical boundary for the Plan.

A second purpose of the Plan is to re-examine and reaffirm, if warranted, the access standards adopted for this roadway by the City Council on May 12, 1981. The Plan will also serve to define, to the extent possible, more precise locations for future full intersections, with median cuts, and will define "windows" for the so-called right-turn-only access points from and into which left turns are prohibited. The Plan will address the issue of both City and landowner installed improvements necessary for development of full intersections and right-turn-only access points.

The draft plan contains three alternative land use scenarios for consideration. The three may be characterized as reflecting differing levels of land use intensity.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Prior to 1993, Piñon Hills Boulevard existed only from its 30th Street terminus (the dogleg at the top of the hill), west to the La Plata Highway. The road was known as "Glade Hills Boulevard" and was constructed in 1982 as part of the continuation of 30th Street west from Municipal Drive in Puesta del Sol Subdivision No. 5. That project was funded largely by state government funds set aside for "energy impacted" communities. The road was constructed to provide a more direct access to the La Plata Highway, thereby shaving as many as three miles off a trip to the west side of the La Plata River.

Initially, the absence of water and sewer utilities, rugged terrain on adjacent land and a location away from the northeast path of growth, combined to minimize development pressure. For years, the only construction along the road segment was at the intersection of PHB and the La Plata Highway.

With the construction of the Butler Avenue to East Main Street segment in 1993, followed by the opening of the third and final segment extending between 30th Street and Butler Avenue, development pressures accelerated. More important than the completion of the final road segment was the construction and opening of Piedra Vista High School in 1998. This major school facility, located north of PHB and east of College Boulevard, constituted a major trip generator and caused average daily traffic levels along some segments of PHB to grow rapidly. As traffic levels increased, so also did interest in intensifying land uses at certain locations along the corridor. Since January 2000, there has been a Special Use Permit request for a 90-bed nursing home (approved); requests for local commercial zoning at the PHB intersections with English Drive and College Boulevard; and several petitions for commercial or office and professional zoning near PHB along Butler Avenue and College Boulevard.

One of the commercial zone change requests along the corridor, Petition No. 1879 (at English Drive), was withdrawn in the face of vocal opposition from nearby residents. A second, Petition No. 1913 (College Blvd.), was tabled pending completion of a corridor plan followed by reevaluation of the petition in light of a future adopted plan.

Repeated requests to consider intensification of land uses along the corridor demonstrated the need for a formal, corridor-wide plan to provide a fair and consistent guide with regard to zoning decisions and other decisions relevant to development of this important roadway corridor.

Several land segments along the corridor remain outside of the Farmington city limits. Some of those areas are worthy of consideration for near-term annexation action. It may be possible to defer action to annex other territory until a later time. Annexation of all territory may imply an intent to extend utilities to support development. The cost of extending utilities to some of the unincorporated areas is currently prohibitive.

BRIEF HISTORY

The history of PHB is necessarily brief since the oldest segment of the road is just now 20 years old, and earliest thoroughfare plans for the road date only to 1977. The approximate alignment of the road first appeared in the City's Major Thoroughfare Plan in March 1977. The future roadway was then referred to as Glade Hills Boulevard, a moniker that would stick until the early 1990s. The City planned to build the 2.7 mile segment between Butler Avenue and East Main Street in 1986. The cost of the project was to be divided between state Community Assistance Council grant funds and local general fund revenues. Right-of-way for this segment was secured in the mid 1980s. Unfortunately, an economic downturn in the 1986-88 period resulted in a revenue shortfall, forcing the City to opt for a less expensive project requiring fewer matching dollars. That project was Sunrise Parkway, between Butler Avenue and College Boulevard.

Construction of the Butler to Main segment of PHB was delayed until 1993 with completion in October of the same year. A few years later, 1997, the middle segment was completed creating a contiguous route between Main Street and the La Plata Highway and points beyond on the western extension of the roadway, known as Twin Peaks Boulevard, constructed by the County to CR 6500 in Kirtland.

From the beginning, emphasis was placed upon the traffic-service function of the roadway, over what was deemed the less important land-service function. Twenty years ago (May 12, 1981), fifteen years before the third and final segment was completed, the City Council adopted access spacing standards for the road. (See **Access Control Standards**.) Though not planned as a “bypass” per se, the City then made the commitment to not allow PHB to become another East Main where land access needs and intense commercialization, even in the pre-Animas Valley Mall days, had contributed to not only a prosperous commercial corridor, but also to a long, heavily signalized and sometimes congested roadway.

Description of Existing Conditions

In the interest of showing adequate detail, the territory of the plan is often divided into three segments: west, central, and east. The west segment begins at the La Plata Highway and extends to a point east of the PHB intersection with Glade Road, covering a distance of approximately 2.5 miles. The central segment begins at the point east of the Glade Road intersection and extends to College Blvd., a distance of approximately 2.2 miles. The east section extends from the College Blvd. intersection with PHB to East Main Street, a distance of 1.6 miles.

The terrain throughout the plan territory is varied, ranging from gently sloping to fairly rugged with very steep slopes. Elevations range from 5,280 feet at the low point on the La Plata River, to a high point of 5,939 feet atop the FAA hill in the central segment.

Land Use

As shown on the Existing Land Use Map, Fig. EX-LU, much of the land along the corridor remains undeveloped—a desirable precondition for a land use plan.

The west segment is the least developed of the three. Aside from development (multi-family residential, commercial and industrial) on the four corners of the La Plata Highway intersection, the nearby Farmington Sports Complex is the only development present. Nearly 1.5 miles in this segment lies outside the city limits, thus beyond the control of City Zoning.

Several housing developments back up to PHB in the central segment. The Cedar Ridge Inn, a nursing home, opened in 2002 north of PHB along the Dustin Avenue alignment. The San Juan College Campus abuts PHB for a distance of 4,000 feet, although the piñon and juniper forest dominates the first quarter mile from the road.

One-quarter mile within this segment, including the Dustin intersection, lies outside the city limits, thus beyond the control of City's Zoning ordinance.

The east segment shares a degree of development with the central segment. Piedra Vista High School is the most dominant land use feature, looming over the corridor east of College Blvd. The Animas and Mesa Grande Subdivisions back up to PHB west of English Drive. Near the Foothills intersection, a Seventh Day Adventist Church and School were constructed in 2000 and 2002 respectively.

Land Status, e.g. BLM

Most land within the corridor is private or at least owned or controlled by institutions or local governments. There is, however, in the vicinity of the "seam" between the west and central segments, including where the Glade Arroyo crosses PHB, a large block of BLM land. Elsewhere, the 40-acre FAA hill, north of PHB between the Dustin and Butler alignments, constitutes a significant BLM holding. The state of New Mexico also owns a remote, 40-acre tract high on the ridge between the La Plata River and the Glade Arroyo.

Utilities

The corridor is not fully served by utilities at this time. While electricity through the City's electric utility is widely available throughout much of the corridor, the same cannot be said for water and sewer. Water tanks, and, in the central section of the corridor, booster pumps exist to provide water to all but the highest elevations. For the most part, main line water extensions would be necessary to serve areas not already developed. Sewer service poses a more difficult problem. Sewer lines cross to the north side of PHB at two locations: at Dustin Avenue, providing service to the Cedar Ridge Inn and at the Porter Arroyo crossing south of Piedra Vista High School, providing service to that school. Both of these lines can be extended to serve some additional areas, but the terrain and the desire to minimize installation of lift stations limits the area within the corridor that can be sewer. The west segment of the corridor currently has no sewer. Even the newly-developed Sports Complex uses septic tanks for liquid waste disposal. Major sewer trunk line extensions would be necessary to support all but the lightest of developments along the west segment.

Adoption of a land use plan may later guide future utility extension to be programmed through the City's 5-year Capital Improvements Plan. A major part of the cost of utility extensions must be borne by the beneficiaries—the land owners. Existing utilities are not sufficient to support the land use patterns set forth on any of the three alternatives—even Alternative "A."

Access Control Standards

Major Thoroughfare Plan

Piñon Hills Boulevard is designated as a Principal Arterial on the City's Major Thoroughfare Plan (MTP). That is the highest of three levels of major streets shown on the MTP. The road has carried this, or an equivalent designation, since it first appeared on the MTP in 1977—several years before the first (westernmost), segment was constructed. Prior to 1977, the northernmost, proposed east/west major street was Windsor Drive, approximately one-half mile south of PHB.

Access Controls

Collectively, the elements of the city's street system serve two major functions:

1. Movement of traffic; and
2. Provision of access to land

In the planning for PHB, elected officials made the decision to assign major importance to the movement of traffic, the "traffic service function," while de-emphasizing the "land service function" best met by local and collector level streets. Improvement to the land access function can only occur at the expense of deterioration of traffic service. On May 12, 1981 the City Council adopted access restrictions for proposed PHB (or as it was called then, Glade Hills Boulevard). Full intersections with median breaks were permitted at one-quarter mile intervals. In between, right-turn-only access points were required to be at least 600 feet from one another or from any "full" intersection.

The definition, application, and minimum access and spacing standards reproduced below, were adopted by the City Council on May 12, 1981. The italicized type represents the exchange of the name "Glade Hills Boulevard" for the new name assigned in the 1990s, "Piñon Hills Boulevard." The new name is substituted here to minimized confusion.

Definition: The term proposed to be used in describing the type of access control to be enforced along *Piñon Hills Boulevard* is "partial access control." It can be contrasted with no access control on one extreme and full access control on the other. Partial access control can be defined as: Control of access to and from abutting properties which is exercised to give preference to through traffic to a degree that, in addition to designated access connections with selected public roads, there may be some median crossings and private driveway connections, in conformance with minimum access spacing standards.

Application: Partial access control should be accomplished along the *Piñon Hills Boulevard* alignment by:

1. Obtaining access rights to and from abutting properties when right-of-way is purchased, dedicated, given as a gift or otherwise acquired by the City; and
2. Requiring frontage road construction and/or construction of intersecting or parallel streets or access easements for direct access to abutting properties, where applicable, consistent with the provisions of the Land Subdivision Regulations and minimum access spacing standards.

Minimum Access Spacing Standards: Locations or points of access along *Piñon Hills Boulevard* should be limited as follows, unless extreme hardships, terrain, or other design principles dictate otherwise:

1. Not more than one access point every one-quarter mile length of roadway, with a minimum separation of one-quarter mile between similar access points, where such access, requires a median crossing.
2. Not more than one access point every 600 feet of roadway with a minimum separation of 600 feet between other access points, where such access does not require a median crossing.

Access controls are typically implemented to address three areas of concern: safety; energy conservation and pollution; and the integrity of the arterial function. It is safe to assume that in the example of PHB, the single overriding motivation was for preserving the long-term integrity of the arterial street function. The existence of access controls has generated more subtle dividends in the other two categories, also.

Elsewhere in the city, the movement function of arterial streets has been compromised by providing “unlimited access” to the lands abutting the arterial. Browning Parkway is the only other street that has City-imposed driveway spacing standards—and they are less restrictive than those in place now on PHB.

These standards for PHB were fortunately adopted years before even the first segment was constructed in the mid 1980s. The implementation of such standards after road construction has occurred and land development starts, is much more difficult. The current standard appears to strike a balance between the traffic movement and land access functions. The standards as adopted provide “reasonable” access to abutting lands without undue compromise to the traffic movement function. Fig. CAP shows how the standards translate to existing and possible, not projected, future access points.

The majority, but not all, of the full intersections are in place or at least identified. It is estimated that at full build-out, there will be 20 full intersections along the 6.3-mile corridor, including the La Plata Highway and Main Street intersections at the two ends

of the corridor. Some locations that would qualify for full intersections based upon spacing standards, may be poorly situated with respect to terrain. Where that is the case, the intersection is not shown on the access location map.

As a rule, most existing and proposed full intersections are located at public street intersections with PHB, or at major facilities such as San Juan College (proposed) and the Sports Complex. Few are anticipated to be constructed solely for the purpose of providing access to private driveways.

Currently, there are only three existing right-turn-only (RTO) intersections along the corridor receiving everyday use. Two of these were “grandfathered” to provide access to pre-existing lots in the A.T. Hogan Addition, First Extension. These two fall short of satisfying the 600 spacing requirement. The other one, an existing oil field service and FAA tower access road is located on the north side of PHB between Dustin and Butler Avenues. It satisfies the spacing standard, but is not located along a median divided segment of the roadway and has no design features to prevent right turn ingress and egress.

Since RTO access points are possible, even likely at private driveways, standards should be adopted to determine what improvements are to be required and where responsibility for their development lies. Figure RTO shows examples of how left-turn movements can be prevented. These structures are particularly important prior to construction of medians. Without physical barriers to restrict turns, left-turn ingress and egress will occur. The immediate impact of these infractions may be minor, particularly if the number of movements is small and the traffic levels on the street are well below capacity. Long term, there may be strong opposition to the installation of medians or other turn barriers after motorists get in the habit of enjoying full access.

Frontage Roads

The potential for using frontage roads as a solution to access control problems along PHB appears to be very limited. An existing frontage road, along a 33-foot wide “patent” right-of-way exists between Hood Mesa Trail and College Boulevard. This road, signed as “Piñon Frontage” is unpaved and has several locations that pose sight-distance or grade problems. Additionally the “design” geometry at the points where the frontage road connects with College Boulevard and with PHB at the only full intersection between College Boulevard and Hood Mesa Trail, is inadequate today and will be unacceptable as land uses intensify on the north side of the front road. There has been discussion about shifting the terminus with College Boulevard north, 330 feet. This relocation and its improvement is recommended as a condition of the C-1 zone change for the northwest corner of PHB and College Boulevard.

A minor frontage road exists on the south side of PHB at the Hood Mesa Trail intersection. This road connects with Daybreak Drive, providing direct access to PHB from the developing, large-lot residential area north of Piñon Hills Golf Course.

The pattern of existing development, the presence of large blocks of public land, and existence of terrain impediments, make it difficult to develop successful frontage road applications within the corridor. These limiting factors, combined with the high cost of right-of-way and construction and operational incompatibilities with the existing arterial, suggest that few viable opportunities exist.

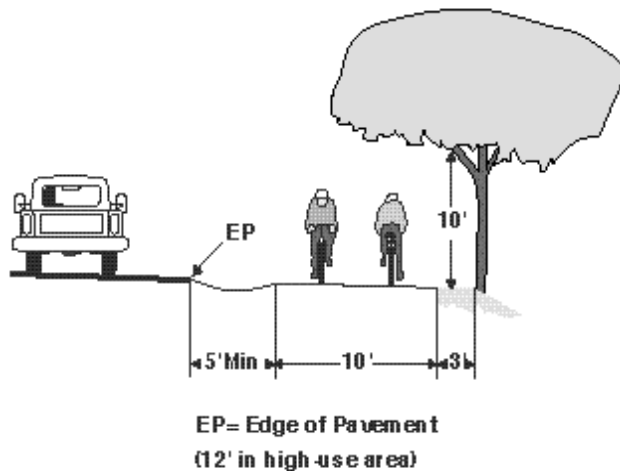
Street Cross Sections and Projected Average Daily Traffic (This section to be completed at a later date.)

Pedestrian and Bicycle Accommodation

The plan recommends the development of a trail system that would extend the length of the corridor and provide a linkage to other pathways and public facilities. The open space areas identified on the plan provide a unique opportunity for the development of a multi-use path separated from the roadway. Walkers, joggers and bikers would be able to use a significant portion of the trail without being exposed to high-speed traffic. Off-street paths can provide a good facility, particularly for novice riders, recreational trips, and cyclists of all skill levels preferring separation from traffic. Multi-use paths should be at least 10 feet wide to accommodate two directional travel for both walkers and bikers.

At the time land was purchased for the construction of PHB, in some areas, the City acquired more land than was actually required as right-of-way. These remnants of land between Sunrise Subdivision and PHB should be utilized as part of a multi-use path. A portion of the path will cross over federal land where easements can be negotiated with the BLM. A pathway could also be developed along the frontage road between Hood Mesa Trail and College Boulevard.

In other areas the pathway may need to be located adjacent to the right-of-way. Where a path must be parallel and adjacent to a roadway, there should be a 5-foot minimum width separating the path from the edge of roadway.



Overview of Three Land Use Alternatives

Staff has prepared three alternative land use scenarios for consideration. Each plan reflects a different land use objective or theme. Each plan has its strengths and weaknesses as well as supporters and detractors. It is anticipated that with the evaluation of each of the plan alternatives, a synthesis of the three will emerge as the preferred option.

Alternative “A” (Fig. LU–A)

This plan reflects a conservation/preservation theme. Of the three alternatives this plan prescribes the least intensive land use development within the corridor. Intensive commercial development is limited to the intersections with East Main Street and La Plata Highway. Land uses along the corridor consist primarily of residential developments and quasi-public or institutional uses such as churches and schools. Limited office development occurs along the major collector streets connecting to Piñon Hills Boulevard, such as Butler Avenue and College Boulevard, where such land uses are already established. The segment of the corridor, which passes through the glade, is preserved as open space. The combination of steep slopes, bluffs and flood plain significantly reduces the development potential of the area and represents a character of land unique to Farmington that is worthy of being preserved.

Alternative “B” (Fig. LU–B)

This plan reflects the development potential of the corridor from the perspective of the owner/developer. Staff attempted to contact the major property owners in the corridor to identify what immediate or long range plans they have. This plan illustrates a higher intensity of development. Most owners felt that some limited commercial development, particularly at intersections along the corridor, should be permitted.

Alternative “C” (Fig. LU–C)

The third plan represents a blend of the first two. The plan still limits intensive commercial development to the nodes at East Main Street and La Plata Highway but also suggests planned office-business centers at major intersections along the corridor. Mixed use activity centers are also encouraged. The orientation of access to these centers should be along the collector road rather than Piñon Hills Boulevard.

Summary and Conclusion

It may be worth noting that in staff’s opinion, the existing commercial zoning districts available through the Zoning Ordinance, may not, without the imposition of extensive conditions, provide the necessary safeguards for properties located near future commercial nodes. The “Neighborhood Commercial” land use category is intended to reflect a more controlled and restricted level of commercial development than is currently permitted in even the C-1, Local Commercial district.

Staff is requesting that the Commission forward to the City Council, a recommendation for one of the land use alternatives presented, a hybrid melding parts of different alternatives, or, if the Commission desires, a different, yet unmapped alternative. Staff is also recommending that the Commission include in its recommendation, direction to retain the existing access controls measures adopted in 1981.

1. Introduction and Purpose

3. Problem Statement
4. History of Piñon Hills Boulevard
5. Description of Existing Conditions/Recent Changes
 1. Map Sections and Mile Markers
6. Access Control Standards/MTP designation
 1. Existing Zoning and City Limits
 2. Land uses
 1. Sports Complex
 2. Mesa Verde Estates 160 ac.
 3. Piñon Hills Community Church
 4. Clayton Investment
 5. First Assembly of God Church
 6. Cedar View nursing Home
 7. Residential Subdivisions (Sunrise, Animas others)
 8. San Juan College
 9. McNutt property at Main
 3. Major land owners (including state and BLM lands)
 4. Terrain and Physical features
 5. Utilities
 6. Street Cross Section
 7. Current Traffic Levels (selected locations)
 8. Natural Gas Wells
7. Future Street Cross Section (in progress)
 1. Pedestrian and Bicycle Accommodation
 2. Existing and Projected Traffic Levels
8. Overview of Three Land Use Options
 1. Description of Land Use Categories and Boundary Generalities
 2. Alternative A
 3. Alternative B
 4. Alternative C
9. Public Input--Move
10. Selection of Plan Alternative or Hybrid.
 1. Conforming to the Plan
 2. Relationship to Comprehensive Plan
11. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations