

# CITY OF LAS CRUCES

**TO:** Historic Preservation Committee

**FROM:** Caitlin Beesley, MHP, Historic Preservation Specialist

**DATE:** May 11, 2026

**SUBJECT:** WIA restoration project

**Case:** Plan review for a preservation project involving the Woman's Improvement Association building, located at 340 N. Reymond Street in the Alameda-Depot Historic District. Project scope of work (SOW) includes landscaping, preservation of original features including wood windows, doors, patio doors, and restoration of the portal-length stairway. Initial SOW proposed removing the accessibility ramp to the rear of the building; Staff is recommending retention of ramp in its current location, to be discussed in this report. The building is owned by the City of Las Cruces and operated as a rental building by the Parks and Recreation Department; it is contributing to the National Register and State Register designation for the Alameda-Depot Historic District.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Woman's Improvement Association building, originally termed "clubhouse," is a one-story structure constructed out of hollow clay tile with an arched parapet and recessed entrance portal supported by rough-hewn posts and corbels. The building was constructed in 1927 by the Bascom French Company, likely from a design by Percy W. McGhee, and fronts Pioneer Women's Park, established by the Woman's Improvement Association (WIA) organization in the late 1900s. Both sites were established as part of the WIA's efforts to affect social change in the community. The building and the park create a relational landscape that provides the modern Alameda-Depot Historic District with a center of social activity.

The WIA sold the parcel, .326 acres of land, to the City in 1996 for \$65,000; a few years later, in 2000, the WIA disbanded. The building is still used as a meeting location, most prominently for the Progress Club, another women's organization dedicated to social change, and is rentable by members of the public. The City undertook an initial preservation project involving the building in September 2003 that lasted until 2004—the accessibility ramp, the most significant work done to the exterior of the building, was likely installed at this time following a design from Tomas Mendez, then-City architect with Public Works. In 2004, the Alameda & Pioneer Park Association, an early iteration of the Alameda-Depot Neighborhood Association, attempted to take over the building and use it as a community center—without City Council support, this never materialized.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> City records, "Woman's Improvement Association\_340 N. Reymond St," retrieved May 14, 2026.

While preservation of the building has been ongoing through routine maintenance, such as updating the bathrooms and kitchenette to allow for continued use, the exterior of the building has declined in appearance, and there has been limited landscaping efforts on the site. The City has sought funding opportunities for preserving the building for several years and engaged in community outreach with the neighborhood regarding a prospective preservation project. Most recently, the Alameda-Depot Neighborhood Association (ADNA) worked with city officials to promote the project during Winter 2026. In Spring 2026, the State obligated \$900,000 from Capital Outlay towards the restoration of the WIA project, with the money becoming available in Fall 2026.

A restoration project for the building has been under deliberation for several years, with the Public Works Department communicating with Community Development and Parks and Recreation Departments regarding restoration priorities; of primary interest involved preferences for restoration in Fall 2024. Desert Peaks Architects is the designer for the project. Project goals presented to Community Development Staff in March 2026 include:

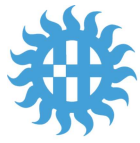
- Site cleaning
- Documentation
- Masonry preservation
- Metal fabrication for new handrails
- Historic wood carpentry repair, replication, replacement
- Thermal and moisture protection measures
- Historic treatment involving doors, patio doors, windows, glazing and plaster
- Painting
- Site landscaping<sup>2</sup>

On the whole, the project is preservation-oriented, with identified historic material being retained and restored. In one area, however, the project proposes making a change to the building in a small but significant way that is restorative as opposed to simply preservative—the project proposes returning the building to it earlier accessibility limits, expanding the front staircase across the length of the front portal and removing the accessibility ramp, currently attached to the southwest corner of the building, to the rear of the building and constructing a new accessible entrance on the south-façade of the building to accommodate this move. The proposal would require the demolition of a small portion of the south-façade, including the loss of a historic window, to make room for the new doorway and the accessibility ramp.

The reasons behind this change are almost entirely hypothetical and not driven by an identifiable preservation or accessibility need. According to the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division (HPD), previous Staff with the City's Community Development Department were interested in listing the building individually in the National Register

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<sup>2</sup> Desert Peak Architects, "25.04.07\_WIA Exterior Repairs and Site Renovations\_Construction Documents," accessed May 11, 2026.



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and believed a restoration of the building to its earlier appearance, including the removal of the accessibility ramp, was necessary for this to occur; HPD employees reiterated to current Staff that, as the building is already currently captured within the National Register nomination boundary for the Alameda-Depot Historic District, it is already in the National Register and does not need to be listed individually.

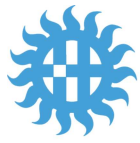
Community Development Staff then spoke with the Parks and Recreation Department and with the City's Accessibility Compliance Coordinator regarding the project and the ramp specifically. Saron McKee, the City's Compliance Coordinator in the Human Resources Department, stated that while the Americans with Disability Act does allow for construction of a new entrance to accommodate accessibility requirements in buildings, that this entrance should ideally be the main entrance and not one relegated to the rear of the building; this design choice would not provide dignity of equal access, instead resulting in a hierarchy or exclusion of access, which is a legal and ethical concern. McKee's preference is for the ramp to remain on the front.

According to McKee, the ramp itself meets accessibility requirements—however, the placement of in-ground handrails on the ramps surface has limited the room required for mobility with a wheelchair or walker, causing the ramp design to not meet accessibility code. Meeting ADA requirements would entail the removal of the in-ground handrails in favor of grab bars installed at the top or upper sides of the ramp's retaining walls. This would be an easy way to bring the ramp into compliance.

Staff involved with the project from the Parks and Recreation Department were split on retaining versus removing the ramp, with two wanting to retain it on the front and prevent the cost of materials and construction in the new ramp and the loss of the historic window on the south-face; a third wanted to remove it to the rear for aesthetic reasons and to restore the building to its earlier design. Ultimately, Staff noted that any costs saved would go towards landscaping or towards interior work (which the City recognizes is needed but is not currently included in the project SOW).

HPD also shared that they would prefer the accessibility ramp to remain on the front of the building, in recognition that buildings need to afford equality of access and an equality of dignity to all users, and that buildings often have to accommodate this type of change over the course of their lifetime. As discussed with HPD, the attached ramp is successful in replicating the design of the building, is proportionate to and compatible with the design of the building, is not a visual distraction from the building, and does not impinge upon its current designation within the National and State Registers.

The bulk of the preservation project is in line with preservation standards and should be approved, with the one exception being the removal of the accessibility ramp. Requiring the retention of the accessibility ramp to the front of the building unites preservation objectives and accessibility requirements. It may also result in a shorter and cheaper construction period. While some money will be spent to change construction documents



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and technical specifications before construction begins, this change will save on demolition, construction, and material costs over the course of the project.

## **DECISION CRITERIA**

To protect the historic character of the property, HPC shall evaluate and determine the appropriateness of designs involving new construction, additions, exterior and interior alterations, and rehabilitation. Plan review for City-owned cultural properties is required “for any new construction, addition, remodeling, rehabilitation, renovation, or restoration, or proposed demolition of the exterior of any building, structure, object, or site, or historic interior, of any cultural property” as stated in Sec. 25-3A. Plan Review of Cultural Properties.<sup>3</sup>

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

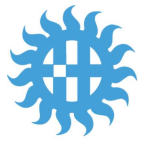
Staff have reviewed this nomination and recommend **APPROVAL WITH THE RETENTION OF THE ACCESSIBILITY RAMP IN ITS CURRENT LOCATION**, based on the following finding:

1. The accessibility ramp remaining on the front of the building does not jeopardize its current contributing status to the Alameda-Depot Historic District. This has been certified by the HPD, who prefer that the ramp remain on the front of the building.
2. The accessibility ramp does not meet accessibility requirements as established by the Americans with Disability Act *because* the in-ground handrails limit the amount of moveability for occupants using wheelchairs, walkers, or other means of mobility assistance, *not* because the current ramp is not to the correct grade or width. The ramp construction would not have to be altered to meet accessibility standards.
  - a. McKee, the City’s Accessibility Compliance Coordinator, is recommending the removal of the in-ground handrails and the placement of grab bars on either top of the ramp retaining wall or on the side will meet accessibility requirements.
3. Removing the accessibility ramp to the rear of the building will result in the destruction of part of the south-facing wall and one of the original windows to accommodate a wider door. Loss of historic material to accommodate a new entrance that is subordinate to the main entrance is not acceptable to preservation objectives or accessibility requirements.

**NOTE:** Recommendations by the Committee must be based on “findings.” Findings for *DENIAL* of the nomination should be articulated by the Committee and may be based on policies found in the City of Las Cruces Development Code, and/or other City plans and policies. Findings may also be based on information presented at the public hearing or information obtained through a site inspection.

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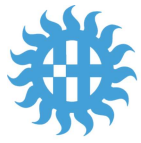
<sup>3</sup> City of Las Cruces, “Plan Review for Municipal-Owner Cultural Properties,” Development Code Sec. 35-3 B-1, February 18, 2025, 80.



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*Figure 1: WIA property at 340 N. Raymond Street; building is highlighted in red.*



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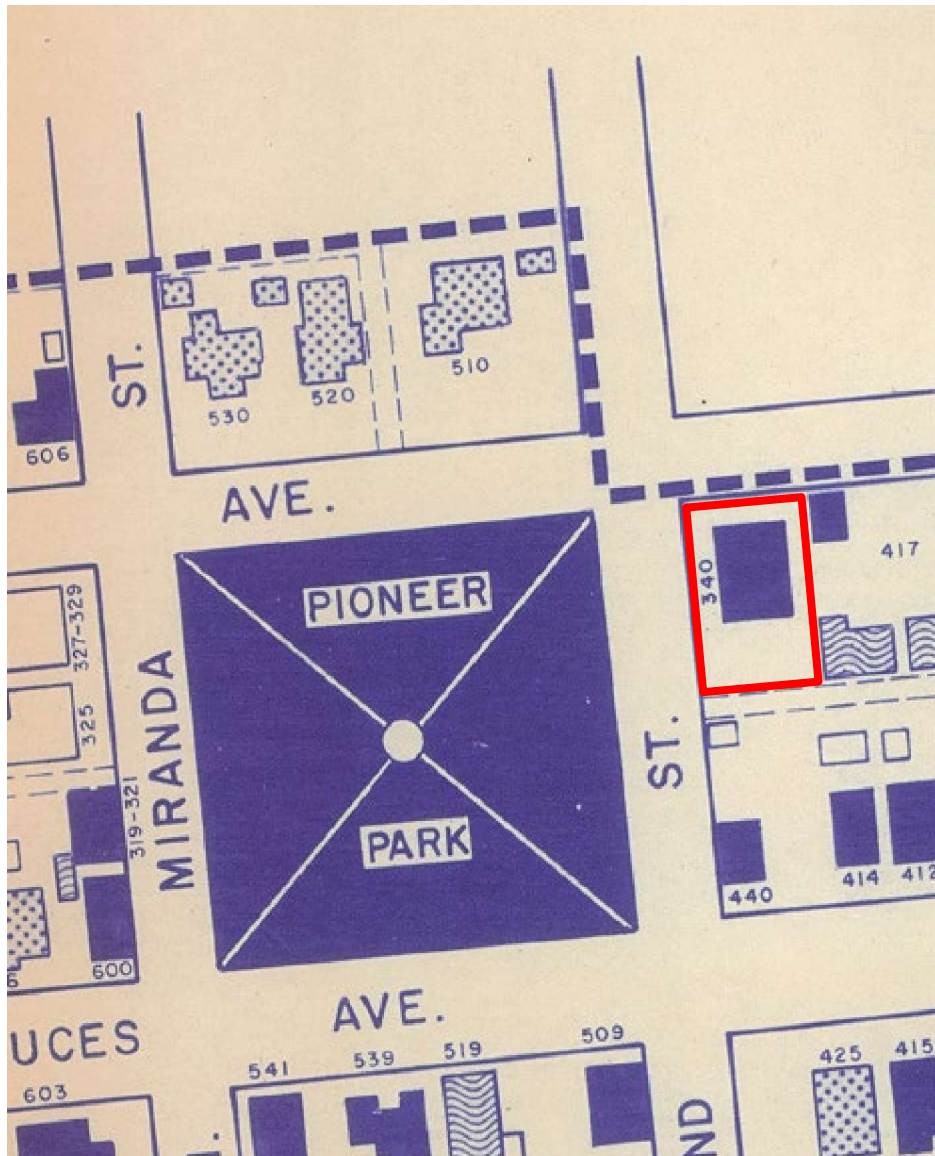
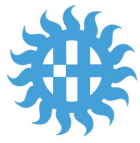


Figure 2: Property identified on map in the National Register of Historic Places nomination form.



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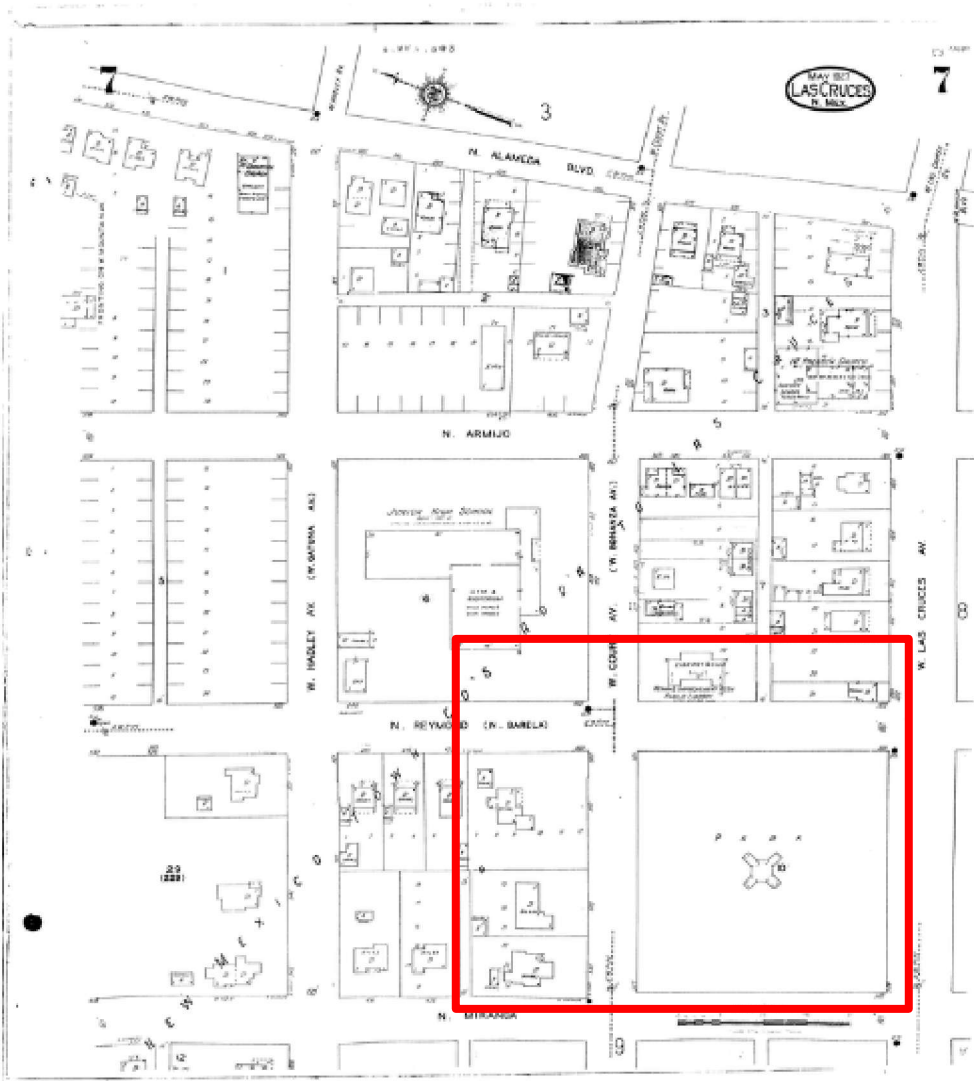
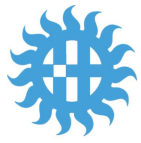


Figure 3: Page 7 of the Sanborn Map Company's 1927 edition of their Las Cruces fire insurance maps. Area highlighted is enlarged below.



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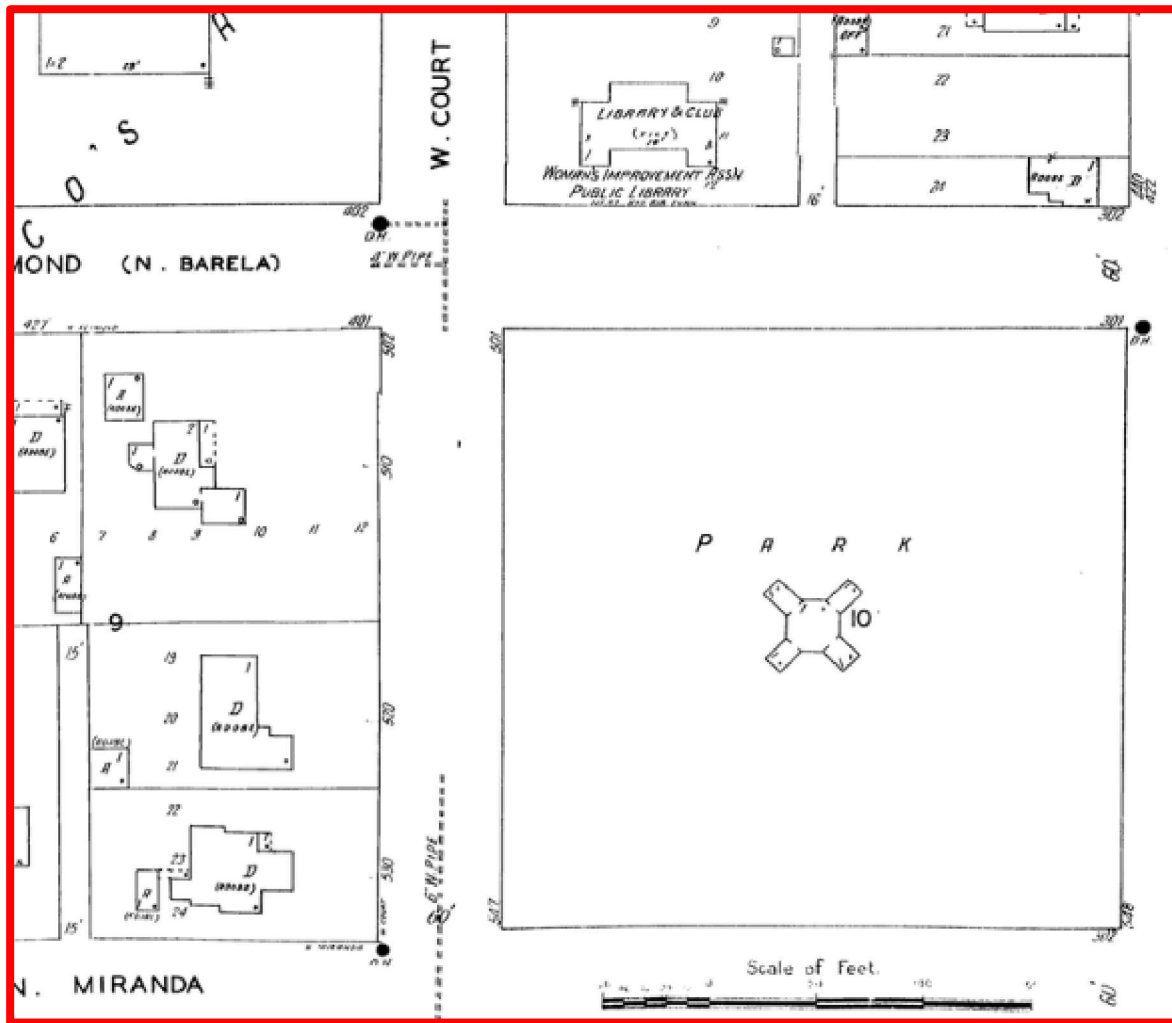
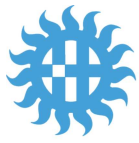


Figure 4: Part of Page 7 of the Sanborn Map Company's 1927 edition for Las Cruces, identifying the WIA building.



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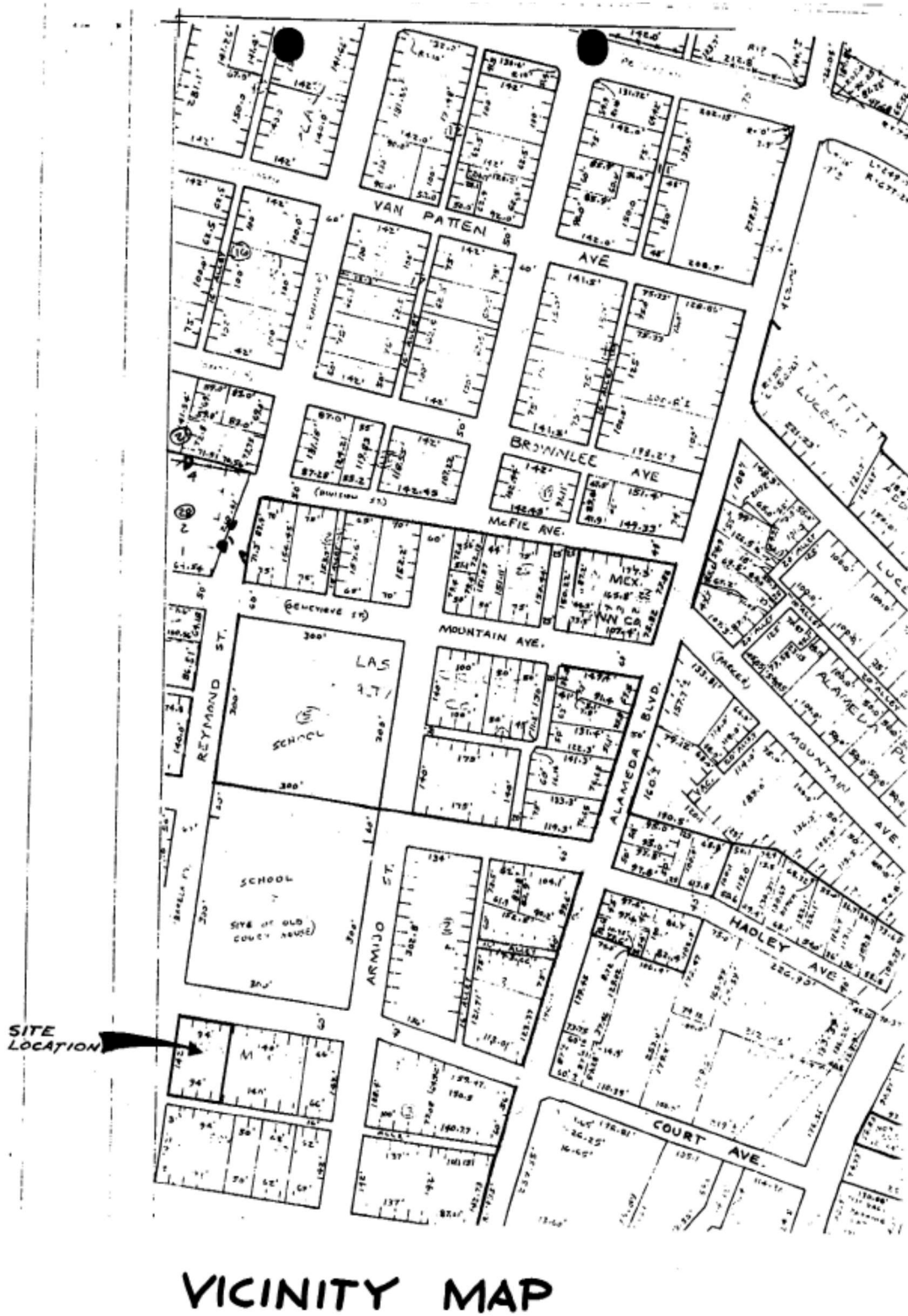
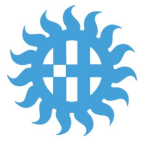


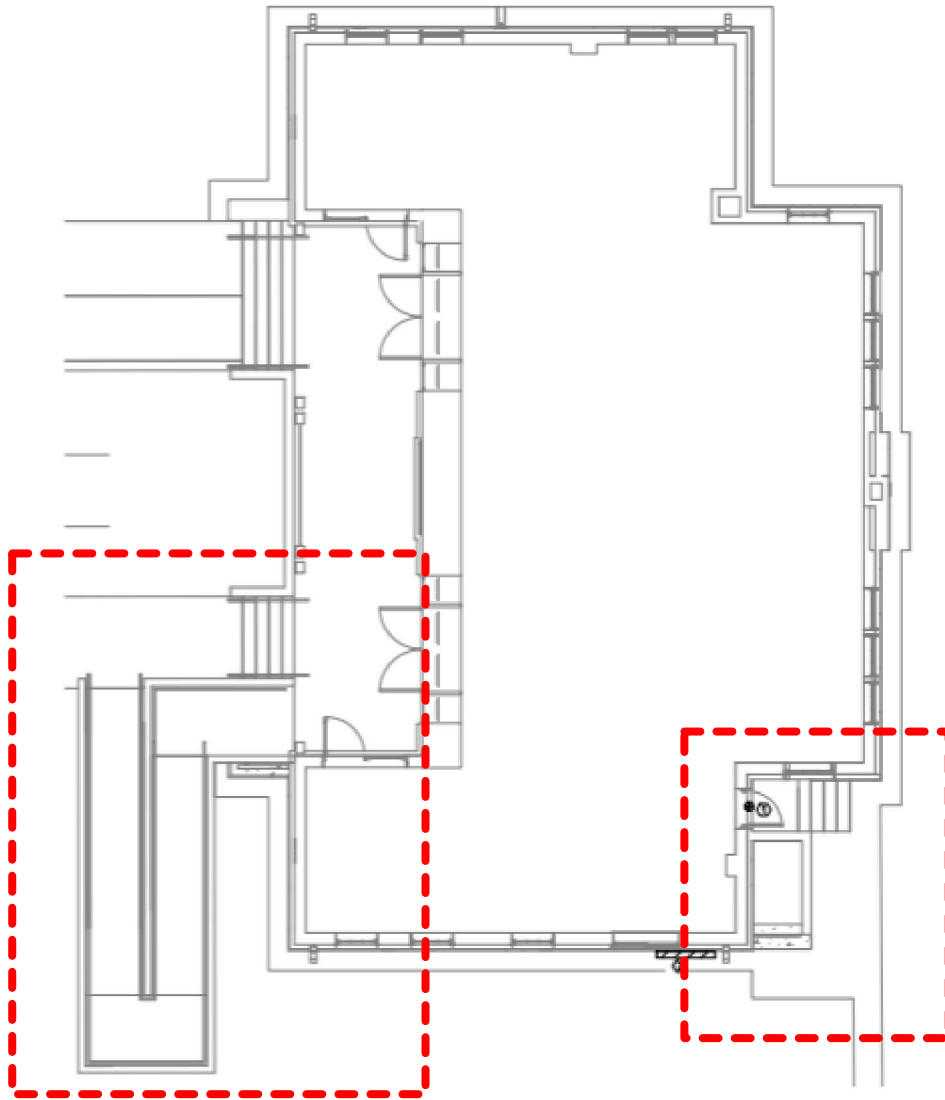
Figure 5: Map included in the documents from the City's purchase of the WIA building in 1996.



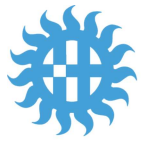
*Figure 6: Aerial photo of the WIA building, showing the accessibility ramp to the right.*



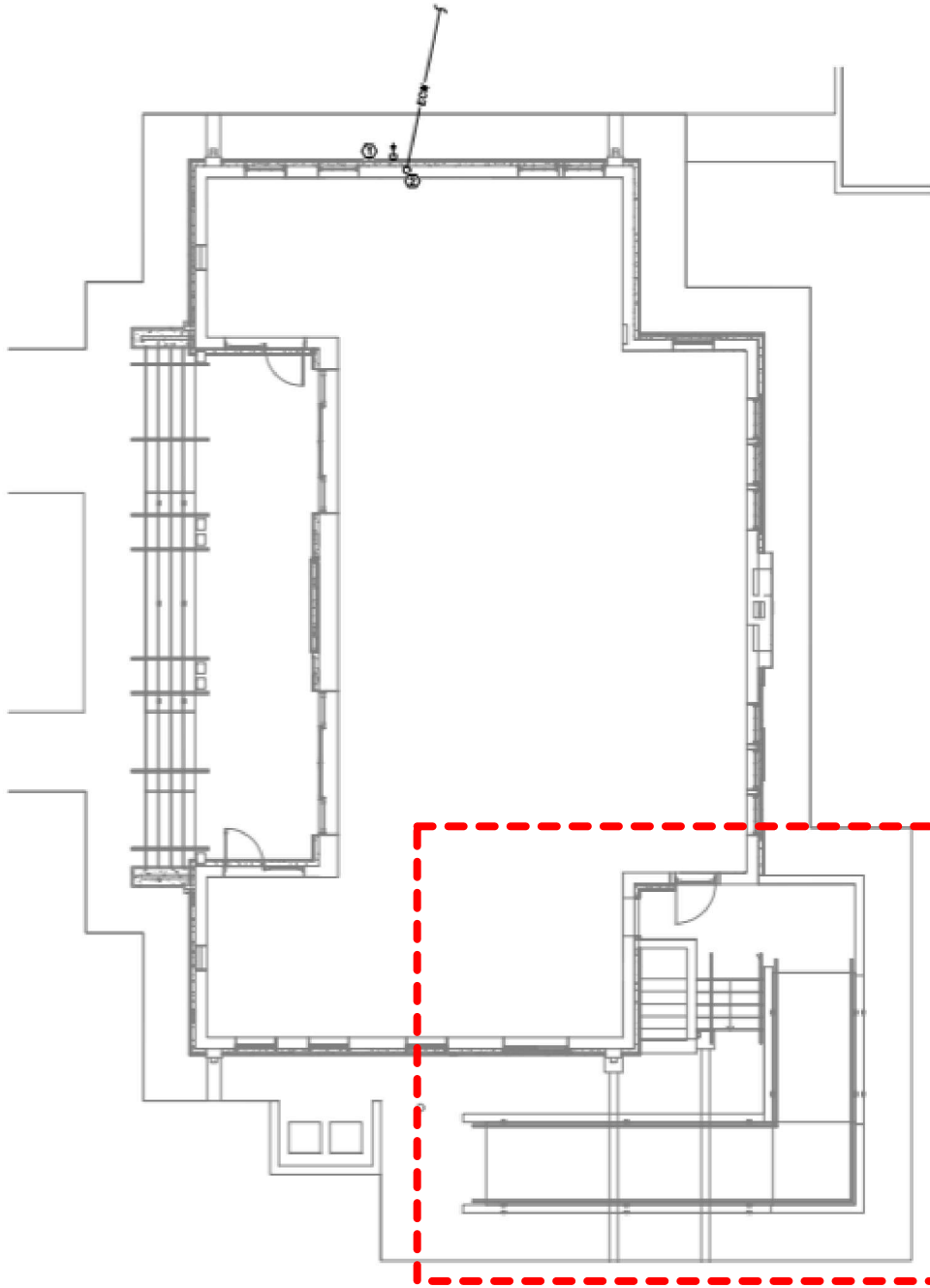
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*Figure 7: Current roof plan of building, showing stair configuration, existing ramp, and area to the rear.*

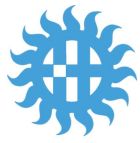


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*Figure 8: Proposed new ramp for the building, showing new entrance door on the south facade of the southeast corner of building.*





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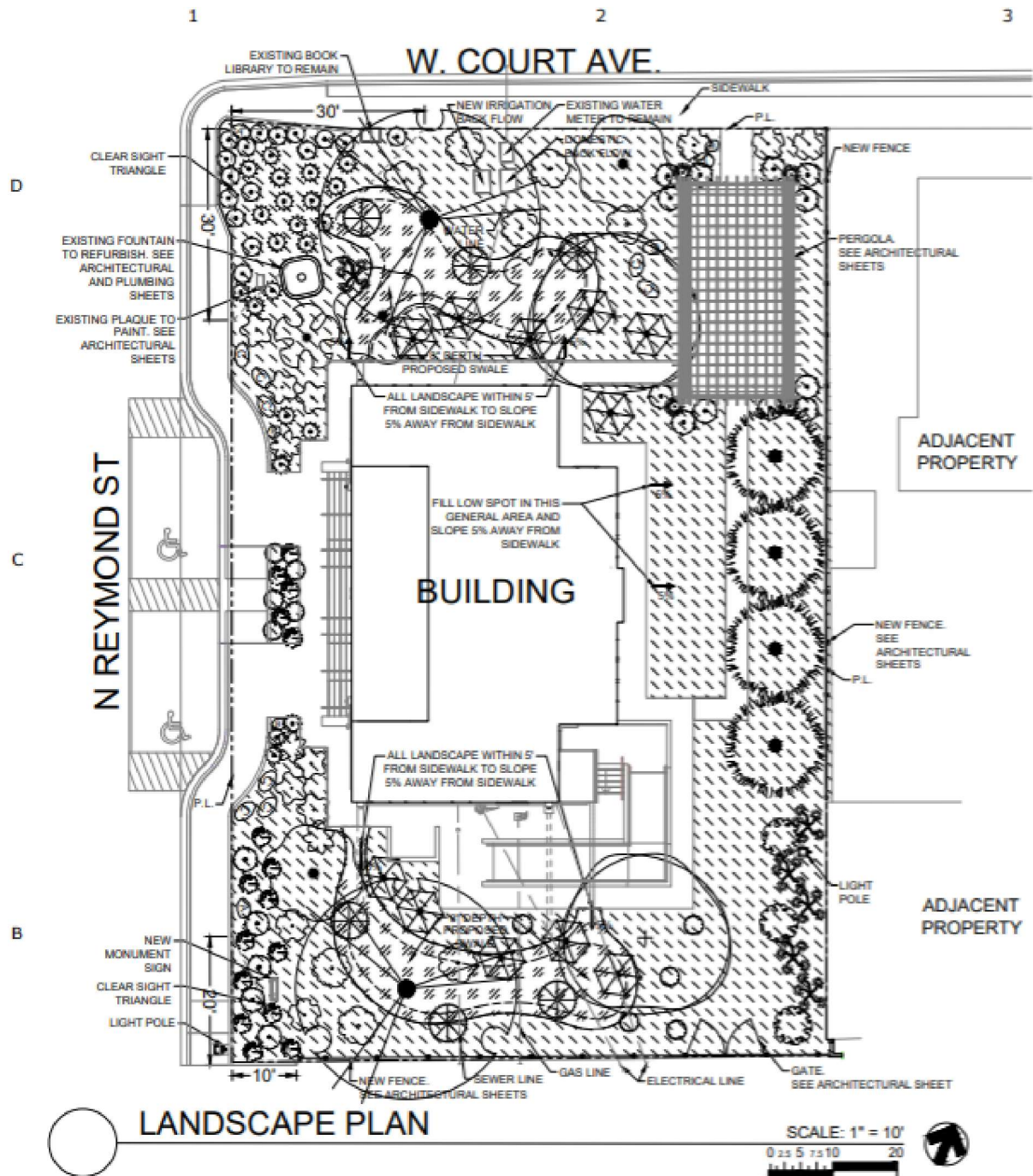


Figure 10: Landscaping plan for the site, identifying placement of new trees, shrubs and other vegetation.

# Historic Preservation Committee

Case # 26ZO1000018

For Meeting of May 20, 2026

Please check box that applies to this item:

☒ QUASI JUDICIAL      ☐ LEGISLATIVE      ☐ ADMINISTRATIVE

**TITLE: A REQUEST FOR APPROVAL TO ALLOW THE LAND USE OF AUTO SALES AND/OR RENTALS, FOR PROPERTY ZONED C-2 (GENERAL COMMERCIAL DISTRICT) ZONING DISTRICT, AND LOCATED WITHIN THE SOUTH MESQUITE OVERLAY DISTRICT. THE SUBJECT PROPERTIES ENCOMPASS APPROXIMATELY 0.50 ACRES IN SIZE AND ARE LOCATED AT 801 E. AMADOR AVENUE AND 343 S. ESPERANZA STREET. SUBMITTED BY GABRIEL GAMBOA, PROPERTY OWNER.**

**PURPOSE(S) OF ACTION:**

Allow an additional land use on the subject properties.

|                                                                   |                                                            |                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>COUNCIL DISTRICT: 1</b>                                        |                                                            |                      |
| <b><u>Drafter/Staff Contact:</u></b><br>John Castillo             | <b><u>Department/Section:</u></b><br>Community Development | <b><u>Phone:</u></b> |
| <b><u>Line of Business and Program:</u></b><br>Community Planning |                                                            |                      |

**BACKGROUND / KEY ISSUES / CONTRIBUTING FACTORS:**

**CODE UTILIZED:**

2025 Development Code.

**PURPOSE:**

Pursuant to Section 36-2.D.4.i.v, it is possible to request an additional land use for a specific parcel that is not already noted within the permitted use list within the South Mesquite Overlay (SMO). Each request will be considered on a case-by-case basis and shall be deemed compatible with neighboring land uses and shall satisfy the purposes of the SMO. The Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) shall be a recommending body to the Planning and Zoning Commission. Final action on this additional land use request shall be made by the Planning and Zoning Commission unless appealed to the City Council. The applicant is seeking to allow the additional land use of auto sales and/or rentals on the subject properties.

**LAND USE HISTORY:**

The subject properties are located on the edge of the SMO boundary. The properties were created through the Lohman La Point subdivision filed in 1902. The properties are developed with a commercial building that was built in 1940s and a commercial parking lot. The properties are within the Mesquite Historic District. In May of 2005 the subject properties and surrounding area established the South Mesquite Overlay Zone through the adoption of Ordinance No. 2200. This legacy district was designed to positively address issues unique to the Las Cruces Original Townsite and surrounding area through the adopted Mesquite Neighborhood Plan and the Mesquite Historic District Neighborhood Design Plan.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

The applicant is seeking to utilize the subject properties to reestablish an auto dealership in the area. The subject properties are located within the SMO Legacy District with a zoning designation of C-2 (General Commercial District). Per the SMO Legacy District, auto sales and/or rentals is a prohibited use, however, under Section 36-2.D.4.i.v the applicant can request an additional land use for a specific parcel(s).

The applicant is requesting to add the proposed land use on the subject properties. In 1977 the site began its operation as an auto dealership, known as Casa De Autos, which has been continually in operation for decades at the subject property. In 2007, the business relocated across the street to 715 E Amador Avenue, where it had been in operation until the property was sold to Families and Youth, Inc (FYI) in 2025.

**SITE SUITABILITY:**

Based on the development standards of the South Mesquite Overlay District, the subject properties and existing buildings meet the required development standards. The applicant has provided a site plan showing all existing improvements of the properties, see Attachment "B".

**ACCESS/TRAFFIC:**

The property is located on a principal arterial thoroughfare, Amador Avenue, as identified in the Elevate Las Cruces Future Thoroughfare Map and the Mesilla Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization Future Thoroughfare Plan. The subject properties current primary access is from Esperanza Street, a local roadway. Both streets are fully improved with asphalt, curb, gutter, sidewalk, and streetlights.

**MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN AND DESIGN PLAN**

The Mesquite neighborhood is comprised of buildings that have been constructed primarily in a Mexican/Spanish traditional style; however, other architectural styles can be found such as, Pueblo, Territorial, and New Mexico Vernacular. The neighborhood was divided into two neighborhoods North Mesquite and South Mesquite and a neighborhood plan, and the overlay zones were created. The South Mesquite was primarily interested in preserving the historic flavor of the neighborhood while addressing land use concerns. While North Mesquite had less interest in a historic component and were more concerned with land use and zoning issues.

The Mesquite Neighborhood Plan was adopted on May 23, 2005, through Resolution No. 05-346. The intent of the neighborhood plan is to create policy that will preserve the character and integrity of the "Mesquite Street-Original Townsite Historic District" and surrounding area. The Mesquite Historic District Neighborhood Design Plan was adopted on July 23, 2007, through Resolution No. 08-032. The intent of the Mesquite Historic District Neighborhood Design Plan is to provide a guide for future decisions as they relate to zoning, land use, urban design, transportation, and enforcement of related standards for the area addressing concerns in the South Mesquite Overlay.

The additional land use request is for properties on the edge of the South Mesquite Overlay.

**ELEVATE LAS CRUCES COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:**

The property is located within the Urban Neighborhood Place Type and adjacent to a Mixed-Use Corridor as shown on the Future Development Map in the Elevate Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan. The Urban Neighborhood Place Type is defined by a variety residential housing types at a medium to high density and areas of supporting neighborhood retail and office uses. Being adjacent to the Mixed-Use Corridor, it is also supported by a mix of residential and non-residential land uses along roadway or trail corridors. The comprehensive plan has numerous goals, policies and actions that support the proposed additional land use, as referenced in Attachment "C".

**FLOOD PLAIN:**

The property is not located within the flood zone.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

The proposed request for the inclusion of the land use of auto sales and/or rentals was routed out to all reviewing departments, and all departments saw no issue with the proposal. Staff recommends approval with conditions for the request of an additional land use based on the finding outlined in Attachment "E." The conditions are as follows:

1. The business will need to go through the minor platting process to vacate a property line to have the property as a single lot before the issuance of a Business Registration License.
2. The business will be required to bring the property into compliance with the 2025 Land Development Code, as amended and all companion codes.

**ANALYSIS/CONCLUSION:**

The proposed additional land use request meets the intent of the Mesquite Historic District Neighborhood Plan and Design Plan, as well as the Elevate Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan. In general terms, auto sales and/or rentals, is a land use that is not permitted by right but maybe approved upon consideration of potential impacts to the surrounding area by the Historic Preservation Committee with final action by the Planning and Zoning Commission. Impact considerations may include factors related to traffic and development compatibility. In terms of the proposed use, the business once functioned on the site and the applicant is wishing to reestablish the use on the subject properties, to serve the community surrounding neighborhood.

**NOTICE:**

In accordance with the 2025 Land Development Code, the Notice of Public Hearing was mailed to all property owners within 500 feet of the subject property. All comments and concerns will be discussed during the presentation regarding the proposed request.

**SUPPORT INFORMATION:**

1. Attachment "A" Aerial Map
2. Attachment "B", Request Letter
3. Attachment "C", Site Plan
4. Attachment "D", Elevate Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan
5. Attachment "E", Staff Findings

**OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES:**

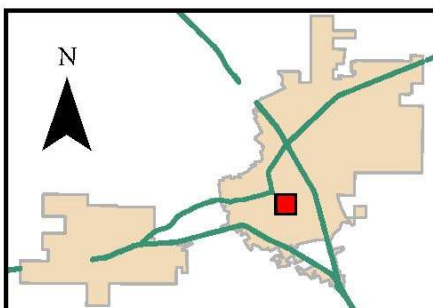
1. Vote "Yes"; this will approve the additional land use of auto sales and/or rental and allow for the re-establishment of the existing business.
2. Vote "No"; this will not approve the additional land use of auto sales and/or rental, and the proposed auto dealership will not be permitted.
3. Vote to "Amend"; this could modify the request for an additional land use and would need further direction from the Commission to staff.
4. Vote to "Table"; this will postpone consideration of the request for an additional land use and would need further direction from the Commission.

**REFERENCE INFORMATION:**

The resolution(s) and/or ordinance(s) listed below are only for reference and are not included as attachments or exhibits.

1. Resolution No. 05-346 (Mesquite Neighborhood Plan)
2. Resolution No. 08-323 (Mesquite Historic District Neighborhood Design Plan)
3. Ordinance No. 2200 (South Mesquite Overlay Zone)

# ATTACHMENT "A" AERIAL MAP



Casa De Autos  
Aerial Map

5/12/2026

# ATTACHMENT "B"

## LETTER OF INTENT

April 30, 2026

City of Las Cruces  
Permitting Division

To Whom It May Concern:

We are seeking a special use permit for "Casa de Autos, Inc" located at 801 E. Amador and 343 S. Esperanza Street. The lot where cars are located is at the parcel 801 E. Amador and the office building is located at the parcel located at 343 S. Esperanza Street. They are and have always been connected. We have and continue to pay property taxes on both parcels of property.

- a) **Statement of purpose and use of the property:** When originally founded in 1977, CDA operated out of 801 E. Amador/343 S. Esperanza Street. Given our success and service to the community, in 2007, we further invested into our community and built a new building at 715 E. Amador, immediately across Esperanza Street. In that time, we were one of the most successful car dealerships in the city, selling vehicles that helped to facilitate access to education, employment and full livelihood for thousands of Las Cruceans. During that period we maintained all proper city and state business operating licenses. In 2025, due to the illness of the owner, Danny Gamboa, we sold 715 E. Amador, to Families and Youth, Inc. another critical resource to the community. As part of that sale, we moved CDA back to the 801 E. Amador location to continue its business operations. We will continue to operate focused on used vehicle sales.
- b) **All property improvements to be made:** Given we are simply moving back to our original unit, where the business began, no improvements need to be made.
- c) **Development schedule for improvements to be made:** see answer above, no intended improvements to be made.

In the course of renewing our state business operating license this year, we had to provide a new business licence with the City of Las Cruces. In that process, we discovered the zoning had since changed and our license was denied. We are seeking a Special Use Permit to remedy this because:

- 1) We continue to operate as a critical resource to the community and have been an upstanding part of the community since 1977 in the same part of town. Historic preservation of our longstanding business, is historic preservation of the Mesquite Historic District. It feels contrary for a business, as long as we have been part of the community to be denied the ability to continue operation.
- 2) There has not been a change in the nature of the business or even the location. We are moving into the same building where our original operations began. Even though our licence lapsed at the 801 E Amador location we stayed current in the location of 715 E

Amador until we moved back. We are not a new entrant in the neighborhood, quite the opposite, we simply move back across the street.

- 3) At the corner of Amador and Esperanza, 801 E. Amador is at the southernmost perimeter of the Mesquite Historic district. It borders other properties to the Mesquite Historic District overlay. As a matter of fact, there is a similar car dealership just one block away.

We hope that through this approval process

Sincerely,

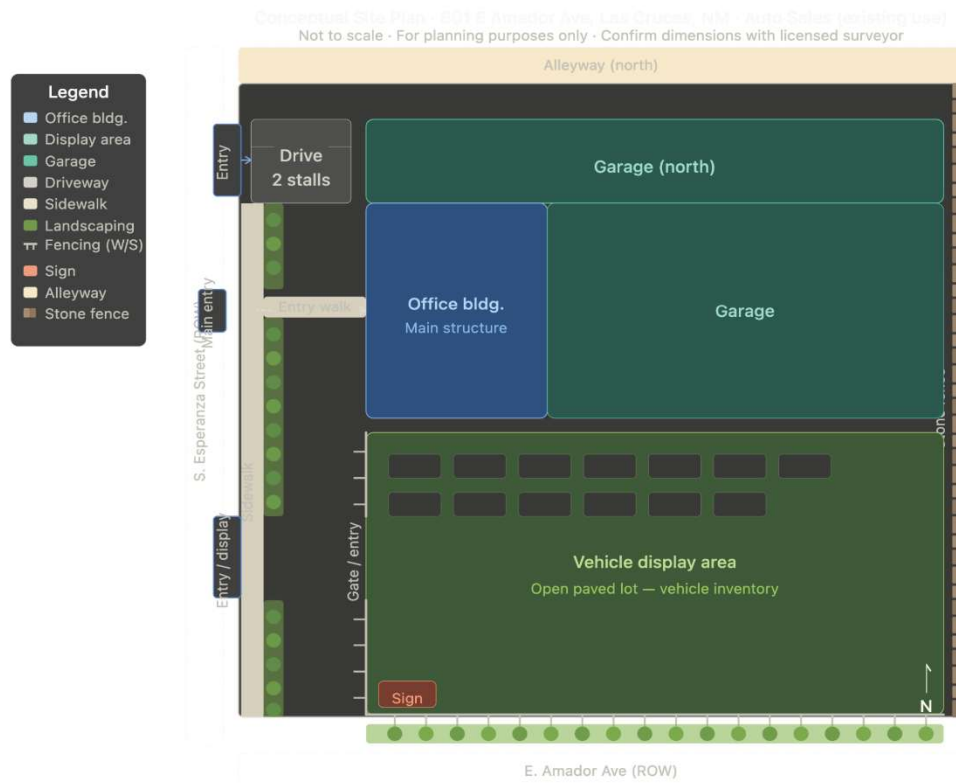
Gabriel J. Gamboa  
Casa de Autos  
575-650-7353  
[gabe\\_gamboa\\_mma@yahoo.com](mailto:gabe_gamboa_mma@yahoo.com)

# ATTACHMENT “C” SITE PLAN

**Total acreage:** 21,550 square feet

**Land use:** Automobile Sales

No site improvements planned / No easements of record



**343 S. Esperanza**

**Parcel Number** 4-007-135-476-240

**Legal Summary Subd:** LOHMAN LA POINT 107 Lot: 5 S: 18 T: 23S R: 2E

**INSTRUMENT** #2510709

9425.000

**801 E Amador**

**Parcel Number** 4-007-135-477-248

**Legal Summary Subd:** LOHMAN LA POINT 107 Lot: LT 3 4 Block: 115 S: 18 T: 23S R: 2E **INSTRUMENT**

#2510709

**Square Footage:** 12125.000

# ATTACHMENT “D”

## ELEVATE LAS CRUCES

### ➤ **Community Prosperity:**

- Goal CP-2: Economic Equity – Generate employment opportunities that create economic security for all residents.
  - Policy CP-2.2 – Support efforts to connect vulnerable populations to job opportunities.
- Goal CP-3: Entrepreneurship – Create a nurturing regulatory environment that generates entrepreneurship and small business investment.
- Goal CP-4: Diversification – Seek a balance of business recruitment, retention, and expansion to diversify economic opportunities.
  - Policy CP-4 – Support efforts to be regionally and nationally competitive in regard to retaining and growing businesses, jobs, and students.

### ➤ **Community Environment:**

- Goal CE-1: Balanced Growth – Encourage efficient land use development patterns that accommodate projected growth in a sustainable manner.
  - Policy CE-1.1: Create consistency between the Elevate Las Cruces Future Development Program recommendations and development regulations.
    - Action CE-1.1.5: Consider the appropriateness of future development proposals with place type designations and their relationship with surrounding land uses.
  - Policy CE-1.2: Promote investment within older areas of the city through redevelopment.
- Goal CE-3: Centers and Corridors – Support community growth through concentrated development at activity centers and along key corridors.
- Goal CE-4: Complete Neighborhoods – Develop mixed-use neighborhoods that incorporate a wide range of recreational, commercial, employment and civic uses.
  - Policy CE-4.2 – Incorporate employment and shopping nodes into new and redeveloping neighborhoods to provide residents with convenient access to services.

## **ATTACHMENT “E” STAFF FINDINGS**

1. The subject parcels are currently within the South Mesquite Overlay Zone legacy district within an underlying zoning designation of C-2 (Commercial Medium Intensity) and surrounded by several other parcels with the same zoning designation.
2. It is located within the commercial corridor as identified in the Mesquite Historic District Neighborhood Plan.
3. Allowing the additional land use of auto sales and/or rental is consistent with other properties along the identified mixed-use corridor and along Amador Ave/Lohman Ave as it is identified as a major thoroughfare.
4. The request for an additional land use promotes investment within older areas of the city through redevelopment.
5. Staff recommendation is in concert with Elevate Las Cruces Comprehensive Plan.