

## Rio Rico Strategies

The timelines below are just a suggestion, if more money exists there should be a faster progression and the skipping of any intermediate conditions. The following are current ideas. This will be a living document that can be updated to reflect demand, funding, and other factors.

Short Term: This first set of ideas should begin right away. Some of these steps will take time to finalize or set in motion but most involve little money and need to be in place to allow the later ideas to flourish.

1. The County needs to secure the necessary property for the future public improvements as early as possible, while they are still available. Santa Cruz County should purchase the parcels identified in this Plan's Concept Plan that will be used for the Plaza, shared parking, parks, and any other needed public space.
2. Concurrently, the County should process the necessary paperwork that facilitates the built environment described throughout this Plan. This paperwork includes:
  - a. Record an Access Easement straddling the back property lines for parcels between Circulo Mercado and W Frontage Rd. Anticipated at 20 ft wide (10 ft on each property) but the final dimension shall be determined by appropriate County staff. This easement will exist to provide access to all properties in this area without the need for any driveways along the streets which will in turn provide more buildable area adjacent to the street, create more street-parking spaces, and generally create a superior walkable environment.
  - b. Create a new Zoning District for the commercial core of the Vitality District. If using B-2 as a base-zoning district, the following are recommended changes:
    - i. Expand Uses to include multifamily residential, artisanal manufacturing
    - ii. Minimum Lot Area: 6,000 sf (instead of 10,000 sf.). This will match the areas of the existing lots and therefore avoid any complications to future development.
    - iii. Minimum Lot Width: 50 ft (instead of 85 ft.). This will match the areas of the existing lots and therefore avoid any complications to future development.
    - iv. 0' setbacks on all sides (instead of 30 ft front, 0 ft side, 15 ft side). This will allow more utilization of the existing small lots and facilitate a more walkable environment. Also consider a maximum front setback around 25 ft. This dimension is large enough to allow a spacious patio, and small enough to ensure the building interacts with the adjacent street.
    - v. Building Height: 40 ft (instead of 35 ft). This height will allow a variety of three-story buildings. This height would allow for tall bottom floors to accommodate a larger variety of commercial and artisanal manufacturing, and a wider variety of interesting roof-lines.
    - vi. Other Restrictions: No on-site parking requirement. This will allow a lot more buildable area for each lot and promote a more walkable environment by not having every building separated from every other building by large areas of parking. 50 ft lots are especially inefficient for parking since a drive isle with parking on each side requires 60 ft. Parking will still be provided with street parking and shared off-street parking lots. New development will still be responsible for the creation of parking by paying an in-lieu fee that goes toward the construction of the off-street parking lots.
  - c. Create a Stormwater Master Plan that makes stormwater work for the area as a whole instead of having each site offset its impact individually. Retention basins often take up about 20 percent of a site. Additionally, they typically want to be between the building and the street which works against the walkable "main street" environment desired for this area. New development will be charged an in-lieu fee that goes toward the construction of off-site stormwater infrastructure. Ideas for offsetting new development's stormwater impacts include:
    - i. Low Impact Development swales in the right-of-way. Often as a primary feature in landscaped parkways that would already exist.
    - ii. A retention basin sized to accommodate the entire commercial core of the Vitality District. It should be located so that it minimally disrupts the walkable environment or incorporated within other usable amenities, such as a park.
    - iii. Size stormwater infrastructure adequately so it does not need retention before it exists the Vitality District. This should be possible because of the District's proximity to the Aqua Fria Wash and then the Santa Cruz River. At the scale of the Santa Cruz River, the increased peak flow from the District will not likely coincide with the timing of overall peak for the River and therefore not create new issues.
  - d. Create an Improvement District to manage and create funds for the Vitality District. Funding opportunities will go toward the public improvements discussed within the Plan. Ideas for funding include:
    - i. In-lieu fees for parking and stormwater. Consider charging slightly more than it would cost to build the development's, off-site, offsetting facilities/infrastructure. There are significant efficiencies of scale for consolidated infrastructure so it will still be a financial net-gain for developers, especially considering their increased on-site development opportunities. These higher fees would be helpful toward expediting the other public improvements discussed in the Plan.
    - ii. Pursuing federal infrastructure funds and using the funds sitting with the Improvement District as the necessary local match.
    - iii. Improvement District fee that is based on land area, not property value. This could create a dedicated funding stream that incentivizes property improvements.

- iv. Sell custom bricks in the sidewalks and plaza to fund its improvements.
  - e. Create Design Guidelines for the Vitality District's unique style.
  - f. Codify a suite of Incentives to get the Private development and environment described in this Plan. Ideas for Incentives include:
    - i. Expedited development review for entrepreneurs developing consistently with the Goals described in this Plan. Have the entrepreneurs write a simple paragraph within a narrative or other document that is already being submitted as a part of their development review process.
    - ii. Staff assistance for lot-combinations including facilitation of meetings with property owners to help the sellers and buyers reach agreements.
3. Begin hosting events for or in the Vitality District that attract attention and investments. The County could initially do the planning and organizing for these events but should eventually turn them over to a local group. They create a sense of pride and ownership in the area. Funds come from their own members and from business donations. The group internally raises funds for hosting more events and uses some of those funds to do fun members-only activities (social events not a part of the list below) to build more interest into the group. Some ideas for events include:
- a. An annual (or similar) social event that invites property owners, brokers, and the general business community in order to spark more conversations that facilitate development of the district. These events could be assisted with presentations or materials that highlight the ideas of this Plan or materials that build on this Plan with enhanced marketing and graphics.
  - b. Simple and regularly occurring events on the Plaza. These events could begin even before funding allows final construction. Many could still work well on an area that has simply been cleared with some dust measures in place. This interim condition can test ideas, begin to generate interest sooner, and inform future design of the Plaza. Ideas for Plaza events on the Plaza include: Markets, food truck events, outdoor concerts.
  - c. Recreational race events that begin and/or end in Vitality District. Partner with local business sponsors. Ideas for race events include:
    - i. Endurance running along the Anza Trail. Could provide a variety of length options. Going to Tubac and back along the Anza Trail is approximately a marathon. This route could generate a lot of cultural and historic interest, and provide a run unique from the other runs in the region.
    - ii. Road biking loops that take advantage of the area's challenging terrain.
4. The County should create a new non-profit group focused on local food production and consumption that begins to realize the Goals in this Plan. Then the County should quickly step aside to free up their capacity. Some ideas for local partners include: Canoa Dining.

Medium Term: This second set of ideas will involve more construction money or build-off ideas from the Short Term Strategies. These should start within a handful of years.

1. Santa Cruz County constructs an off-street parking lot. Depending on funds, it could remain unpaved until funds allow. There is significant existing supply on the street, so the in-lieu system should already be running.
2. Design and construct Business Incubation building(s). Some ideas for its programming include:
  - a. Micro offices
  - b. Small shops or booths
  - c. Food hall connected to commercial kitchens
  - d. Makers space
3. The County should create an organized program that assists people through the progression of starting small in the Business Incubation facility (or elsewhere in the Vitality District) and moving toward their ultimate goals. This program should be advertised within the Incubation building(s), on the Plaza, or any other public space within the Vitality District. Some ideas on things this program could help with:
  - a. Explain how to reserve/create a space and how to get small loans.
  - b. Paperwork assistance
  - c. Partner with banks with a program that creates loans for those that have proven their business idea within the Incubator or elsewhere.
  - d. Partnerships with NGOs and Non-profits that provide grants and/or loans.
4. Create a sense of place through targeted marketing and branding efforts. These efforts should go into traditional advertisements, branded area events like a restaurant week advertised throughout the region, and onto region-wide wayfinding signs. Some ideas for themes include: Promote the Vitality District as a base for adventure, build on its connection to nature, as an aesthetically unique style along the Santa Cruz.
5. Create final construction drawings for all public improvements shown on the Concept Plan. These drawings should contain extensive public participation with the community. These final plans can be used for further marketing efforts.
6. Begin landscaping and programming the Passive Park to help it get established with lower-cost improvements. Some ideas include:
  - a. Create paths for exploration.
  - b. Create community garden plots.
  - c. Begin a pumpkin patch between the proposed Plaza and the Agua Fria Wash.
  - d. Enhance native landscaping throughout by adding native plants and maintaining existing plants that are appropriate. Highlight this landscaping with signage near the paths to invite exploration.

Long Term: Many ideas in this stage are expected to have to wait for funding. Many of these should be done as soon as possible to leverage any momentum that exists and not started later than within a decade.

1. Actively recruit businesses to locate within the Vitality District. Many of the Strategies in earlier efforts should have communicated this area's potential to local entrepreneurs. Significant effort in recruitment should only be considered if interest is still low at this time.
2. Construct the Public Improvements from the Concept Plan.
3. Construct recreational trail system in the Coronado National Forest for hiking and mountain biking, expand road biking opportunities, and connect more multi-use trails to create loops.
4. Design and construct public buildings for Culture. Some ideas for these buildings include:
  - a. Community center
  - b. Library expansion/relocation
  - c. Museum
  - d. Artists studios
  - e. Craft studios
  - f. Community College extension classrooms
  - g. Entertainment venue