

## I. A CONCEPTUAL PLAN



RENEWED HISTORIC DOWNTOWN PAGOSA SPRINGS  
CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

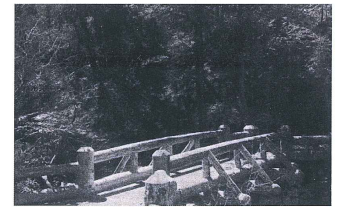
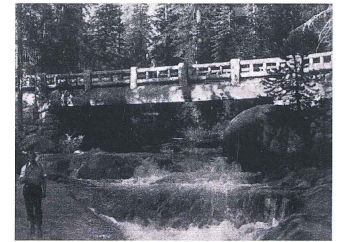
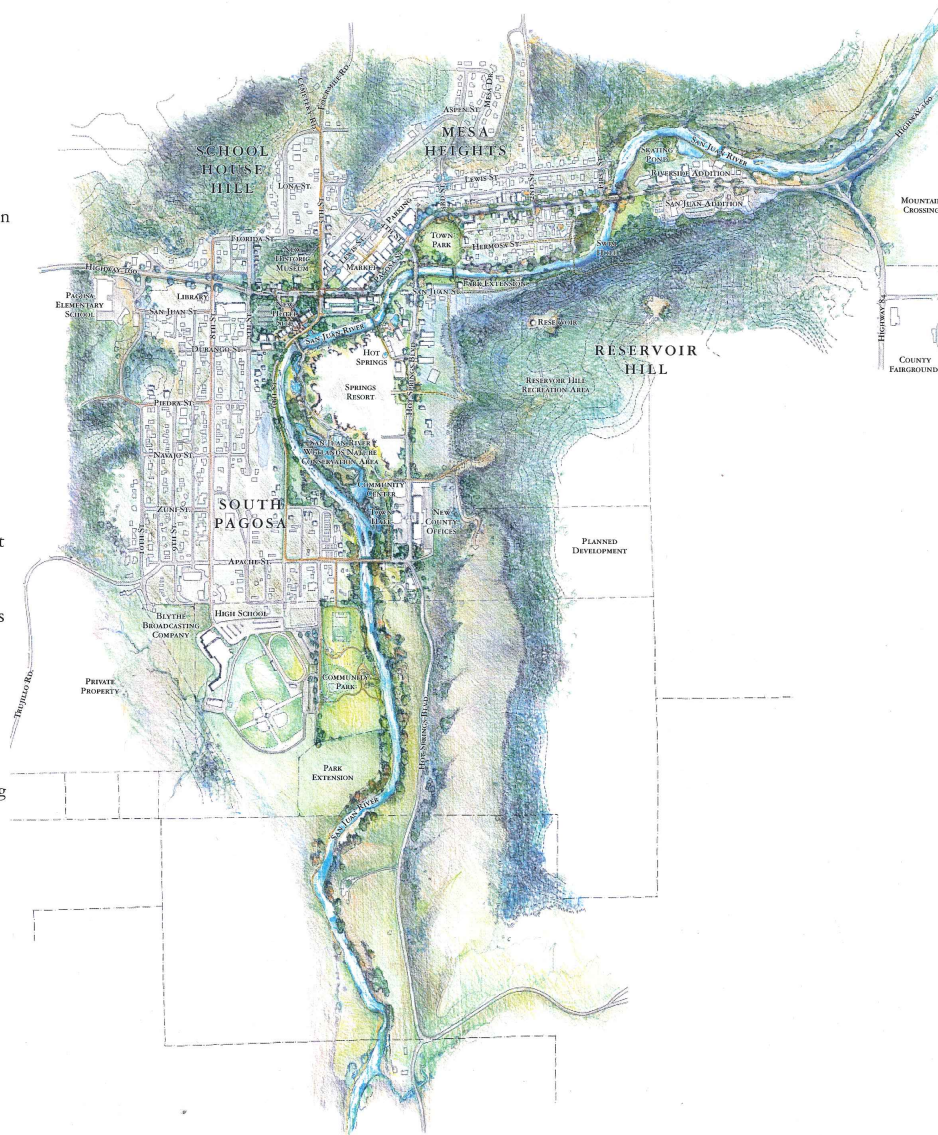
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### OPPORTUNITIES, PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Opportunities for enhancing downtown Pagosa Springs can be identified on the basis of those elements of the *built downtown environment* that represent major public and private investments and that the community values as cherished amenities in their daily lives. Together with the surrounding *natural setting* dominated by mountains, the San Juan River and native vegetation, these public and private improvements make up the *physical framework* of roads, paths, parking facilities, pedestrian places, parks, utilities systems, flood control improvements, buildings and landscaping. This setting gives downtown Pagosa Springs a unique *character*, links it with its historic past and establishes its special *identity*.

This given physical framework is part of the natural context within which residents have built the town. While some of the downtown improvements have outlived their useful lives, most of them have sufficient value to the community to warrant careful consideration for preservation and upgrading. Together with vacant land zoned for development, the outdated facilities offer *opportunities* for renewal, for effecting improvements in downtown Pagosa Springs. Examples for such facilities include the County complex and the Junior High School. Successfully pursued, those opportunities will prepare the downtown area for meeting the future expectations and functional requirements of a growing community.

Under the leadership of the Community Vision Council, the community and its consultants have identified a number of opportunities for improving and promoting Pagosa Springs as a special place of distinct identity in Colorado and the Nation. These recent efforts have focused on qualities of the town that distinguish it from other small Rocky Mountain communities. They also identified opportunities for introducing and promoting Pagosa Springs as a unique place to live in and visit.



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Opportunities

Some opportunities for enhancing the character and identity of the downtown relate to the larger, overall landscape framework. These opportunities that can be pursued through improvements to public elements of the downtown environment are related to:

- a. A safer Highway 160
- b. Automobile parking in key areas
- c. Strategic re-use of some public building sites (Jr. High, County)
- d. Central riverfront park
- e. A new "village green"
- f. A system of trails and open spaces
- g. Entry gateways, and
- h. Bridges

PRIORITIES

An objective of the Council is to identify priorities for early projects. The most promising early projects would not be capital-intensive: they would expand on the system of trails and recreation amenities that serve the growing community. Other, more ambitious projects would involve improvements to public facilities (i.e. County headquarters, schools, etc.) while opening up opportunities for private development that bring new life to the downtown business community.

PHYSICAL SETTING

Planning for conservation and development within downtown Pagosa Springs will be most influenced by two strong linear features: The meandering natural corridor of San Juan River and the engineered path of Highway 160. The river corridor includes the stream, the associated flood plains and wetlands; it represents a central feature in the downtown area, and – in spite of periodic flooding of its banks – it is increasingly



recognized as a welcome amenity by the community. Highway 160 is both a vital link and a divisive feature in the spread-out town; it serves its dual role with compromises, because while it is a national highway that must provide for swift and safe auto travel between faraway places, it is also expected to facilitate convenient local travel between parts of the community.

Downtown's physical setting affected the original form of settlement: the original township was laid out in the river valley, at the north and west sides of the mesa now referred to as Reservoir Hill. Accordingly, engineers plotted the residential blocks in east-west and north-south direction. In the focus of the historic settlement is the old hot springs. The two neighborhoods are linked by the diagonally oriented central blocks devoted to serving residents.



## THE SAN JUAN RIVER CORRIDOR

The San Juan River corridor is seen as a great natural organizing element in planning for downtown Pagosa Springs.

Opportunities associated with the river corridor are:

- a. Gradual transformation of the river corridor to a visual and functional link with the surrounding Rocky Mountains wilderness.
- b. Implementation of trails planned along the San Juan River.
- c. Exploration of accessible community recreational areas along the San Juan River for:
  - o swimming (at the "swim hole" and other suitable places).
  - o Creation of a central, natural open space defined by Centennial Park, the Apache Street Bridge, 6th Street and the western limits of developable land associated with Hot Springs Blvd.
  - o Boat launching (from the park, upstream of the 4th Street Bridge).
  - o Picnicking (at all riverfront parks).
  - o Skating (at the ponds, upstream of the 1st Street Bridge).
  - o Festive public events on a "Town Green."

The planning team recommends that in response to the foregoing opportunities, the Town should:

- Recognize the San Juan River as an important natural feature, organizing element and recreational resource.
- Feature the river as an important means of enhancing Pagosa Springs' identity.
- Use the river corridor for building a trail system that would tie together parts of downtown and recreational and educational facilities throughout the downtown community.
- Respond to surrounding districts with appropriate use of the riverfront, providing for a wide range of recreational and civic functions.



The planning team believes that restoration of the San Juan River in the “river bend” area will create a welcome visual focus to the entire downtown area; the restored river corridor will benefit both the broader community and adjacent property owners as well. This should be recognized through ample public access to the restoration area and through a sensitive design of the transition zone between the river and adjacent development.



## HIGHWAY 160'S ZONE OF INFLUENCE

The federal Highway 160 represents both a blessing and a problem for Pagosa Springs; it provides the town with vital highway access, yet because of the regional through traffic it is designed to carry, it also disrupts daily life in the community. The highway represents a special concern to everyone who would like to see a safe, inviting pedestrian environment in downtown Pagosa Springs.

Most noted *opportunities* related to the Highway in downtown Pagosa Springs are:

- a. Taming traffic flow through the historic downtown area.
- b. Improved safety of the road and crossings as it moves through downtown.
- c. Enhanced travel experience along the highway through landscaping and better design of highway frontage.
- d. Western and eastern “gateways,” marking entries to downtown Pagosa Springs.
- e. Clear directions and convenient access to visitor parking.

Consultations with Mr. Abrams, the team’s traffic and parking specialist have led to the following recommendations:

- Reduce dependence on Highway 160 as the functional “Main Street” of Pagosa Springs.
- Slow down traffic to 25 mph through the entire downtown area.
- Plan for pedestrian safety on Highway 160 as it passes through the historic business district.
- Provide short-term customer parking near the stores; incorporate maximum amount of parking in the street environment.
- Create long-term employee and visitor parking within short walking distance of the central business district.
- Improve visual experience along the highway as it passes through downtown Pagosa Springs.



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## THE SPRINGS RESORT

Owners of the Springs resort site control land of strategic importance to the small town's future. The hot springs area includes the following *opportunities* for benefiting its owners and the community:

- a. Development of greater number and variety of visitor accommodations in a way that recognizes the central location and respects the character and scale of historic downtown.
- b. Broader range of health services centered on physical and spiritual wellness.
- c. Development of a landscaped, lighted pedestrian link from one or two pedestrian river crossings to the Community Center.
- d. Sensitive design response to the river corridor restoration/enhancement program.
- e. Creative response to urban design principles reflected in the Town's plans for Hot Springs Blvd.

The owners/operators of the Springs Resort have established the nucleus of an expanding visitor destination centered on healing waters coupled with physical and spiritual well being. Planning for the local recreational resource and the associated visitor-serving district will be generated by the owners/operators through a thoughtful planning and design process. It is clear that the Springs Resort will serve as an important economic engine meant to enhance the town's competitive edge for tourism dollars. In view of this, the planning team believes that owners/operators, their guests and residents would all benefit from consideration of a few key planning and design criteria that include:

- Respect for the scale and character of downtown Pagosa Springs.
- A frontage on Hot Springs Blvd that is perceived as safe and friendly by pedestrians.
- A sensitive transition between the built environment and the restored river corridor.
- Maintaining a clear orientation to the San Juan River.
- Creation of streets and spaces within the resort that invite for pleasant walks by day and night.
- A plan that gives much thought to how the resort can be built while



## THE HISTORIC BUSINESS DISTRICT

The downtown blocks served by "Pagosa Street" and Lewis Street represent Pagosa Springs' historic Central Business District (CBD) that tied together the first two residential neighborhoods along the San Juan River. Composed of a mix of mainly old and some new buildings, the district serves its customers with about 70,000 square feet of retail space, 60,000 square feet of office space and 12,000 square feet devoted to miscellaneous services. In addition, the CBD also accommodates the County Courthouse and Jail, two churches and a movie theater. To the Northeast, the CBD is flanked by the Junior High School, to the southwest by the Centennial Park, along the river.

The historic CBD consists of three complementary parts:

1. The "Pagosa Street Block," on the north side of the street, between 4th and 5th Streets,
2. The County Courthouse block, overlooking the San Juan River and the Springs Resort, on the south side of Pagosa Street and
3. Lewis Street.

In spite of the fact that Pagosa and Lewis Streets run parallel with each other, and that two of the commercial zones are on Pagosa Street, today these three areas of commercial establishments live separate lives; they do not contribute to each other to form a strong retail destination.

The characteristic Pagosa Street Block most remembered by travelers on Highway 160 is separated from the Courthouse block by four lanes of highway traffic. Hidden from view, Lewis Street turns its back to through traffic and offers a more tranquil environment, but is virtually a different world with its two churches, parish Offices and thrift shops. The entire historic CBD suffers from the lack of short-term parking.



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**Three Promising Commercial Areas**

Consultations with Mr. Hill, the team's retail advisor led to the following conclusions:

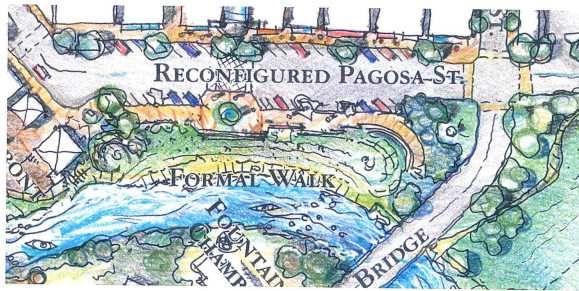
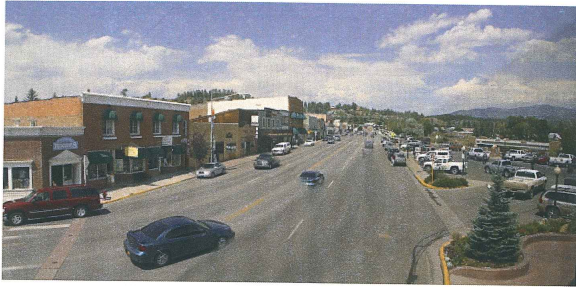
In the long-range future, with completion of the full Springs Resort and after relocation of the County offices, there will be opportunities for establishing a viable commercial service area on Hot Springs Boulevard. In the near future, the Pagosa Springs business community has opportunities to create three mutually complementary commercial zones.

The first zone would involve an expansion of the commercial frontage on two sides of Highway 160, between 2nd and 4th Streets. This area could become a viable retail/dining hub if more parking would be provided.





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Through new construction and adaptive re-use of some homes, this area could build on the emerging pattern of retail and food and beverage services that have been already successfully established there. Critical to the appeal of the area would be respect for the existing architectural scale, and character and for the mature trees.

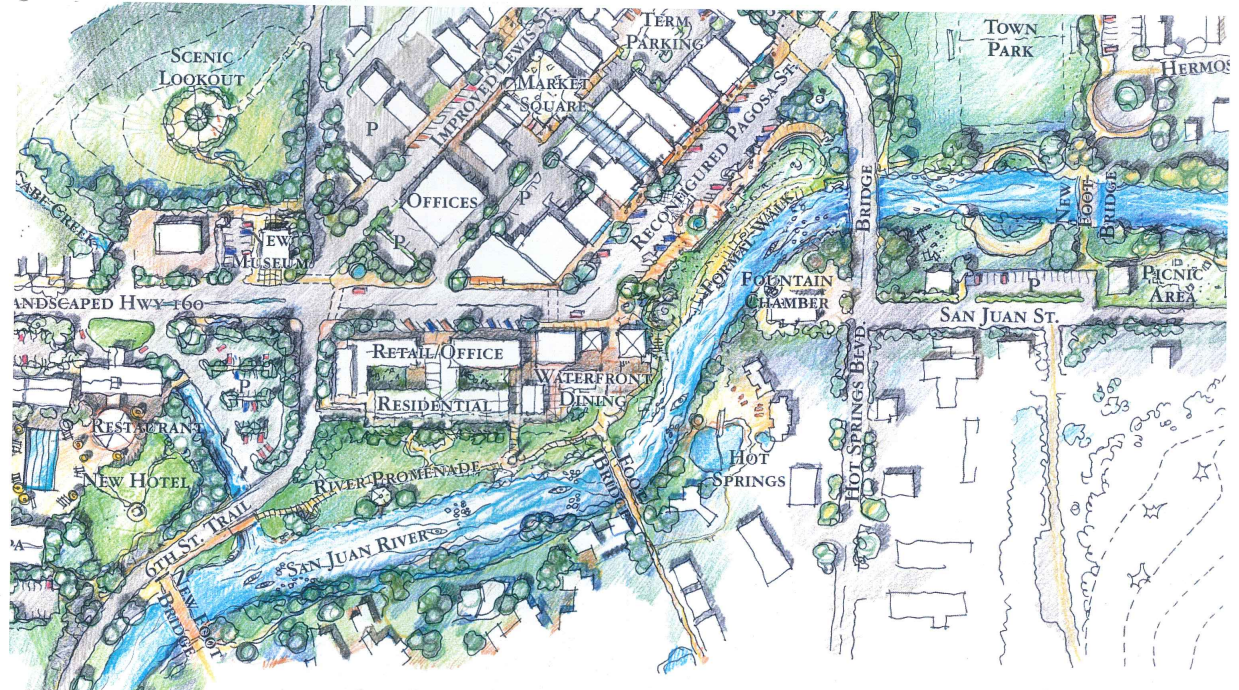
The second retail zone might include the storefronts along Pagosa Street facing the existing city parking lot across the street, adjacent to the San Juan River, between Hot Springs Blvd. and Fifth Street. This area would become more viable if short-term parking is provided in front of the stores and behind the buildings, along the service alley. A mid-block pedestrian access from Pagosa Street to the alley would be essential.

The old movie theater could become a community playhouse/regional theater. Other businesses could include mountain provision and specialty apparel and home furnishing stores, along with the more viable existing establishments.

The third retail zone could be developed later, when the County facilities have moved and their sites can be redeveloped. It appears that up to 50,000 square feet of commercial space could be built there. New establishments would serve both residents and visitors looking for better places to dine and

shop. Success of the area could be enhanced through two major restaurants of about 6,000 square feet with outdoor terrace seating above the river; two cafes of 3,000 square feet; a specialty food market that includes significant prepared foods for picnics and on site consumption; and up to a dozen specialty retail stores with frontage on Pagosa Street.

Mr. Hill cautions that "the Town can not create these zones. It will take developers with a vision for downtown Pagosa Springs who have the ability to assemble land and buildings and to attract the required retailers."



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Criteria for Success

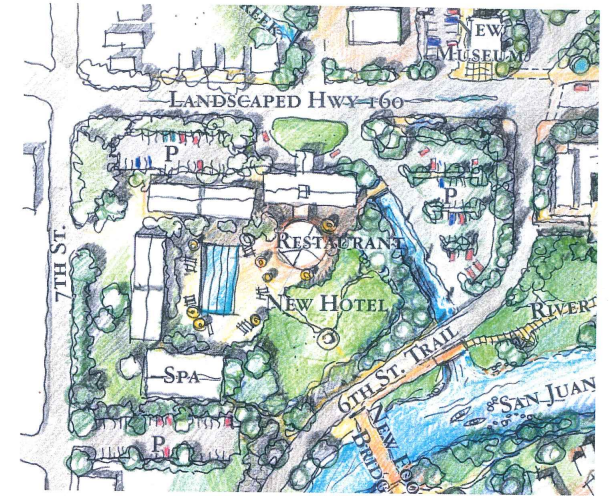
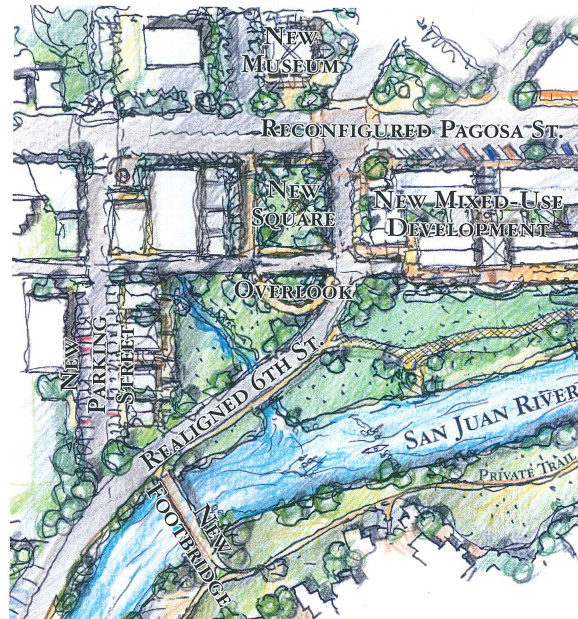
Mr. Hill provides valuable guidance to local property owners and the business community when he recommends:

“The downtown needs a well thought out merchandising plan that identifies specific retail uses appropriate for the community and visitors to the community. Examples of retail uses that may be appropriate are: Specialty food market, home décor, arts/crafts gallery, upscale restaurant, provision company and fashion.”

“Towns cannot restructure their tenant mix. Those are restructured by property owners and there are numerous Colorado towns where that have occurred.”

“The first step is to get the parking and the pedestrian flow right.” It would be helpful to “attract more residential” development and to build more visitor accommodations within convenient walking distance to the CBD.

“Retail needs some quality overnight accommodations.” Visitor expenditures will be essential to the success of the local business community.



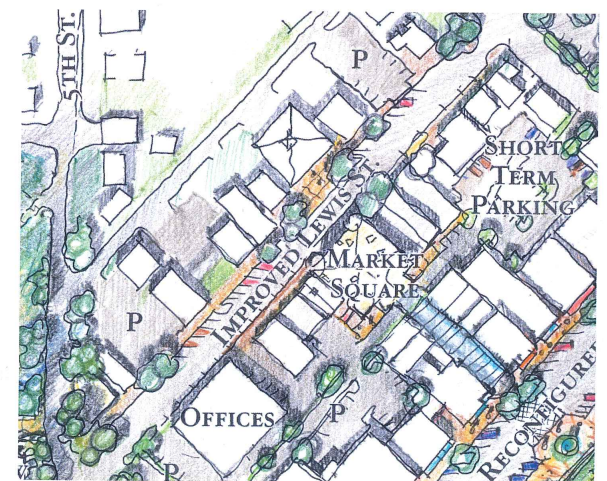
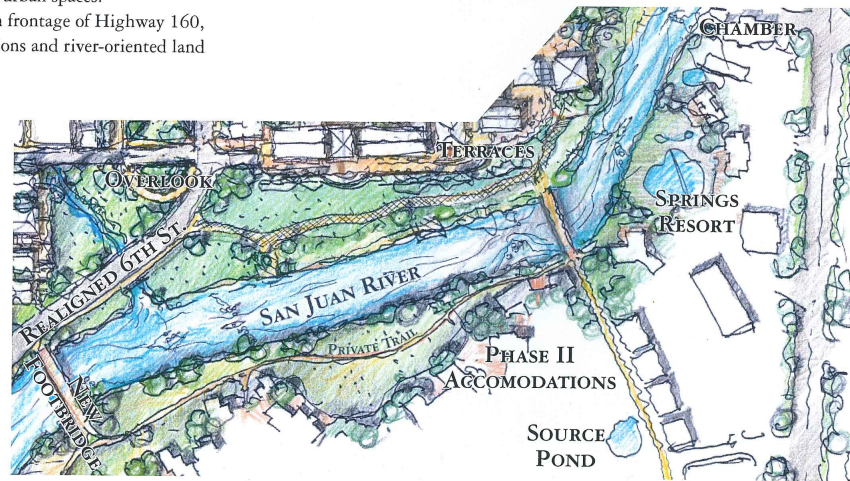
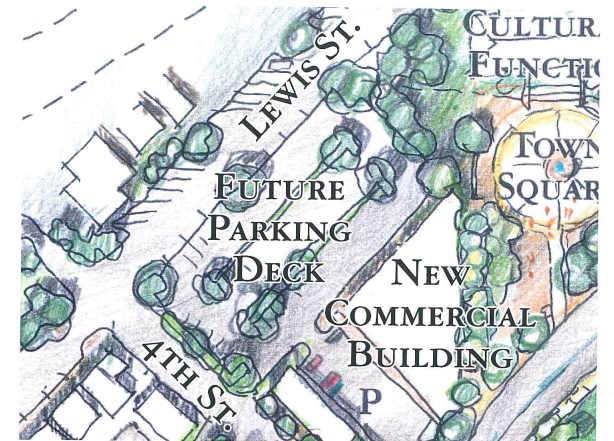
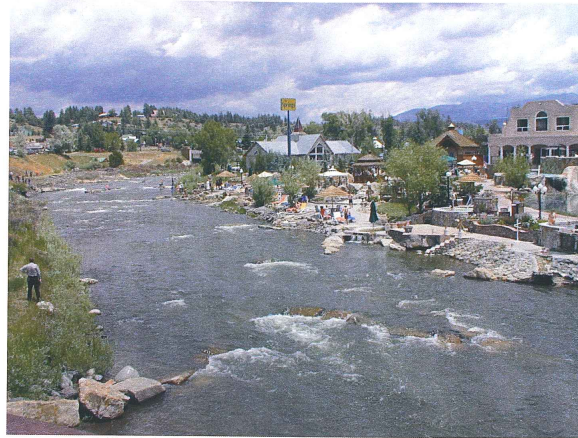
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Planning Criteria

It became quickly evident to the professional team that businesses would benefit from more convenient, short-term parking, safer pedestrian circulation and a mid-block pedestrian connection between Pagosa and Lewis Streets.

In planning for the historic business district, the professional team considered the following planning and design criteria:

- a. Clearly marked entrances to the historic downtown business district.
- b. Ready access to short-term customer parking.
- c. Reconfigured vehicular and pedestrian circulation network within and around the downtown blocks.
- d. Redesigned and expanded auto parking facilities with consideration of strategically located, efficient parking structure on part of the Junior High School site.
- e. Modified road design for Highway 160 to facilitate short-term diagonal parking in front of the shops.
- f. An interconnected network of inviting urban spaces.
- g. Creative redevelopment of the southern frontage of Highway 160, with focus on new visitor accommodations and river-oriented land use and site design in the vicinity of the County offices.
- h. Preservation and adaptive re-use of the Intermediate School building
- i. Preservation of the view of this building from Hot Springs Blvd.



### Early Action

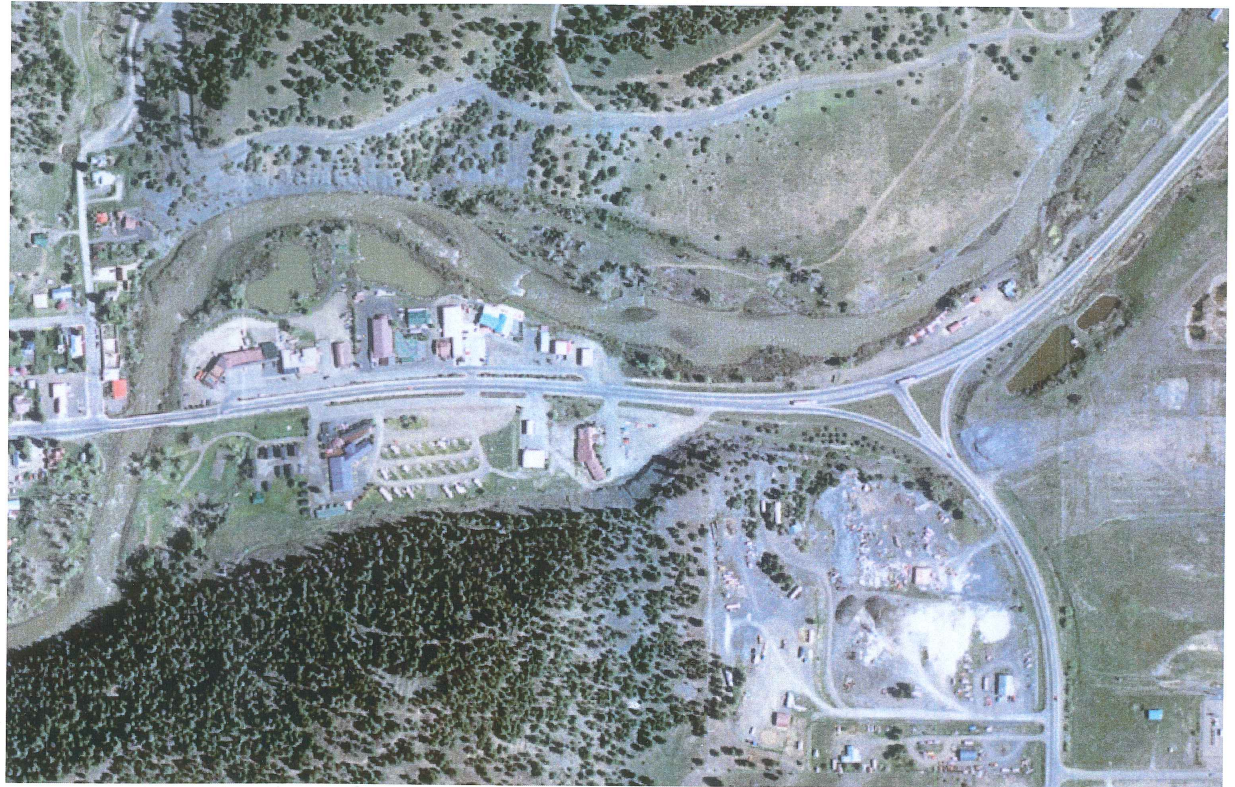
The CBD could improve its performance through parallel action by the affected business community and the Town administration. Actions to be considered are:

- Re-activate the dormant Downtown Business Association and organize property owners and businesses for concerted action.
- Work with property owners to plan for efficient, short-term parking along the alley between Pagosa and Lewis Streets. Consider removal of small ancillary structures.
- Consult with a retail consultant to establish a realistic goal for the CBD in relation to other competing business centers and decide whom it wishes to serve and how that could be best accomplished.
- Retain services of a professional team of architects, urban designers and landscape architects to prepare a coordinated plan for individual improvements,
- Secure low-cost financing for private improvements. Retain a transportation consultant and evaluate options for creating a safer and more inviting pedestrian environment for customers.
- Determine parking requirements for business owners, employees and customers and prepare a plan that provides sufficient parking for everyone.
- Consider parking employees' vehicles in a nearby off-site location. Assure convenient parking for customers.
- Explore means of reducing adverse impacts of through-traffic on Highway 180. Determine the most promising means of dealing with truck traffic and agree on a plan of action.
- Work with the State and the Federal Departments of Transportation toward finding a satisfactory solution to the traffic problems identified by the transportation consultants.
- Identify short-term, interim remedies. Prepare plans for a long-term solution.

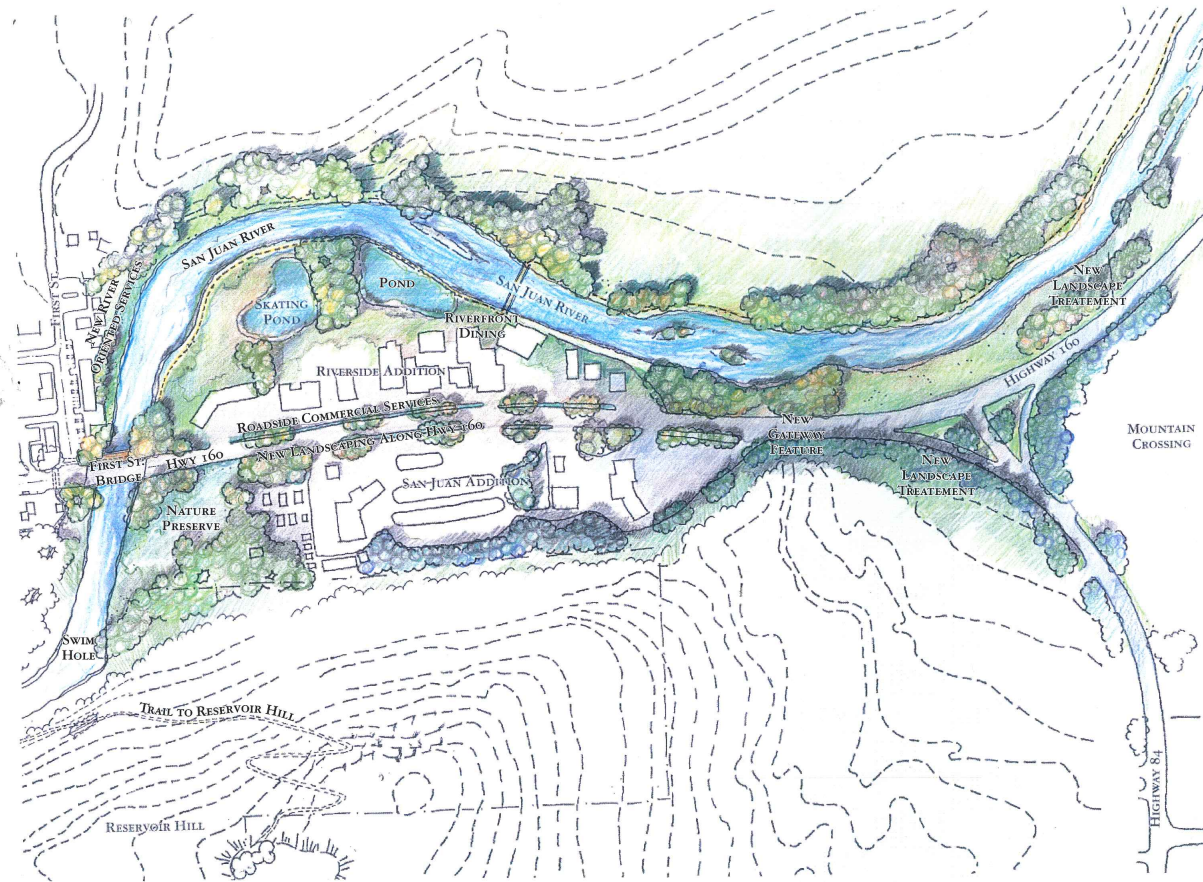
### HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

The eastern approach zone and the two historic neighborhoods vary in character and thus offer somewhat different opportunities for improvements. The approach zone and the adjacent historic neighborhood

are bisected by Highway 160 and are enhanced by the San Juan River. The southern neighborhood is just skirted by the river and is sheltered from Highway 160 by businesses, the Library, the Bus Depot and the Elementary School.



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**Eastern Approach Zone**

The approach zone extends along Highway 160 from the junction of Highway 84 and the First Street Bridge. This area serves Pagosa Springs very well with highway-oriented businesses. The existing facilities and pattern of development seem to be appropriate for the place and time.

A transition between open ranch lands and the town, the zone features restaurants, informal overnight accommodations and other commercial establishments surrounded by ample parking. The southern commercial area backs into the steep slopes of Reservoir Hill. Development on the north side of the highway is skirted by the San Juan River and associated ponds and wetlands. One of the ponds is popular with locals for winter skating.

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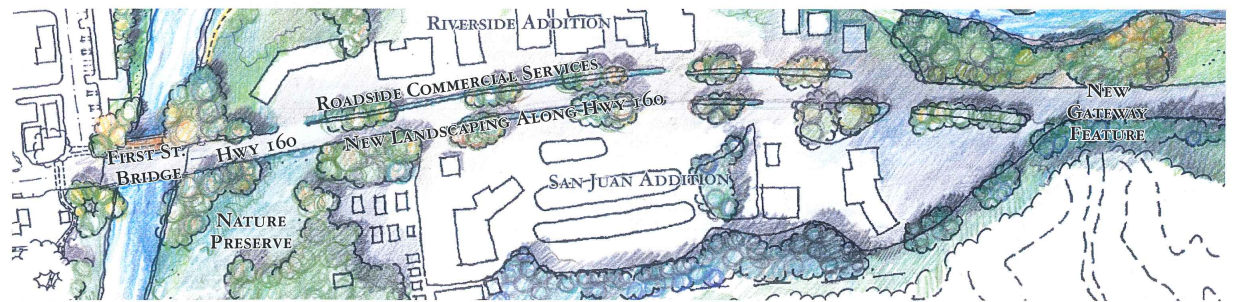
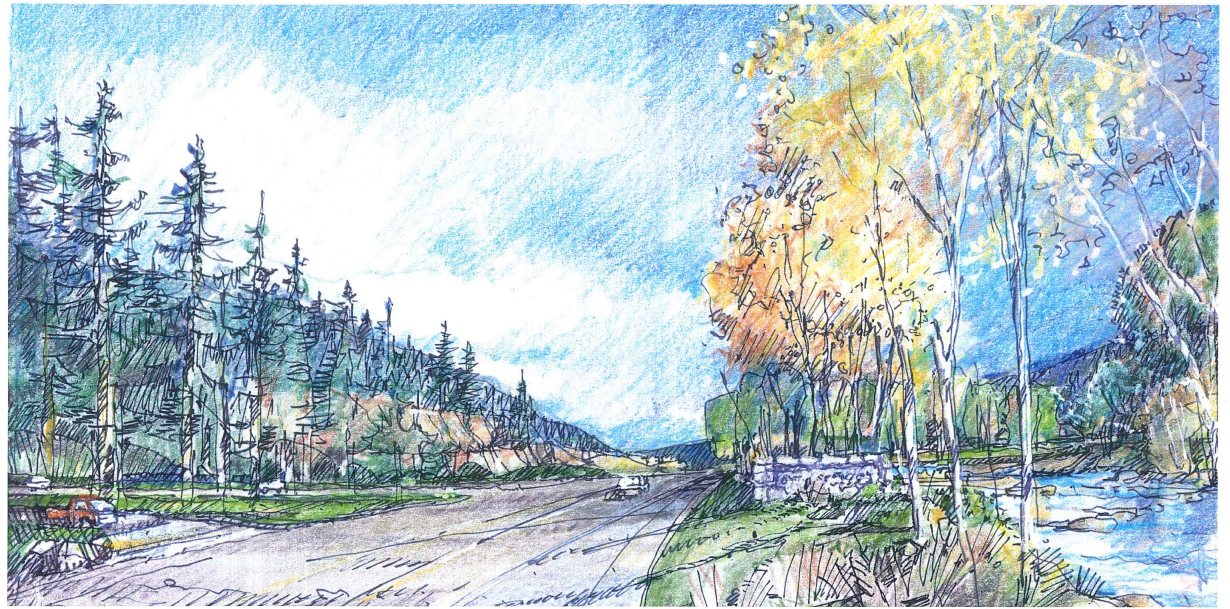
Opportunities for enhancing this area include:

- Installation of a more appropriate "gateway feature."
- Informal landscape treatment along the road;
- Landscape treatment of the San Juan River corridor.

Presently, Pagosa Springs greets arriving travelers at the junction of Highways 160 and 84 with a sign. The consultants recommend consideration of a gateway feature more in keeping with the community's character; where emphasis would not be on a sign but on appropriate grouping of trees.

Travel experience through the area could be improved through informal landscaping along the road. Intermittent roadside planting would soften harshness of the commercial parking lots.

In keeping with the intent to treat the San Juan River as an important natural feature, flood-tolerant trees should be planted on both sides of the river through this area.



### Eastern Neighborhood

This neighborhood includes twelve blocks between First and Fourth Streets, the San Juan River Mesa Heights to the north.

Chief *opportunities* in the Eastern Neighborhood are:

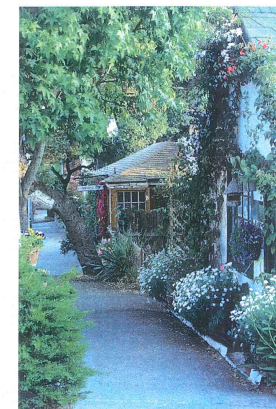
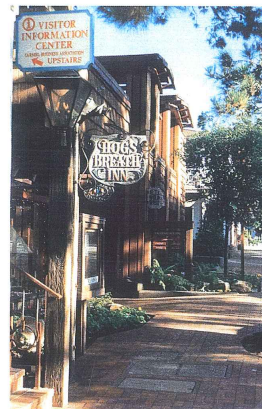
- a. Continuation of the trend to provide food and beverage services and specialized retail services associated with local arts and crafts along Highway 160.
- b. Thoughtful and environmentally sensitive implementation of the trails planned to serve the neighborhood.
- c. Carefully conceived landscape programs along the San Juan River corridor and Highway 160.

Settled in a narrow river valley, the neighborhood combines homes and businesses. Business establishments thrive on highway exposure and access; they serve both residents and travelers on Highway 160. Recommendations for preserving the viability and historic character of the district and for enhancing downtown Pagosa Springs' identity include:

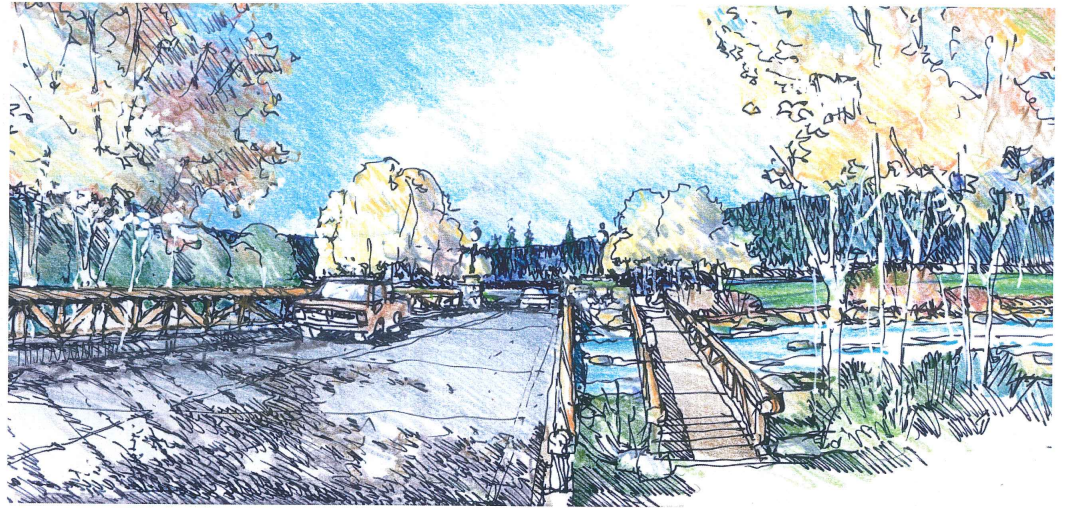
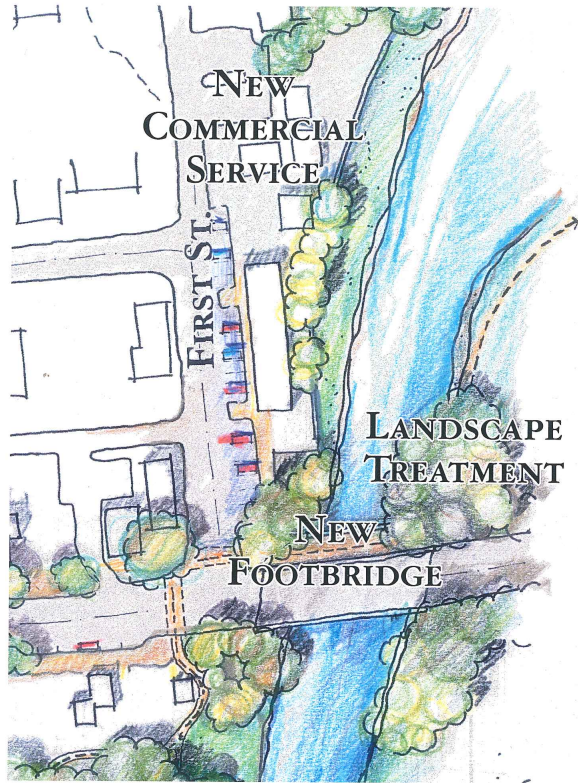
- Preserve the present pattern and scale of development,
- Introduce appropriate planting along the river corridor and the highway,
- Treat the First Street Bridge as an important entry point to the historic downtown area
- Expand the trail system that connects recreational resources with neighborhoods in the downtown area.
- Build a foot-bridge across the San Juan River,
- Abandon the western section of Hermosa Street and incorporate the right-of-way into a larger riverfront park.



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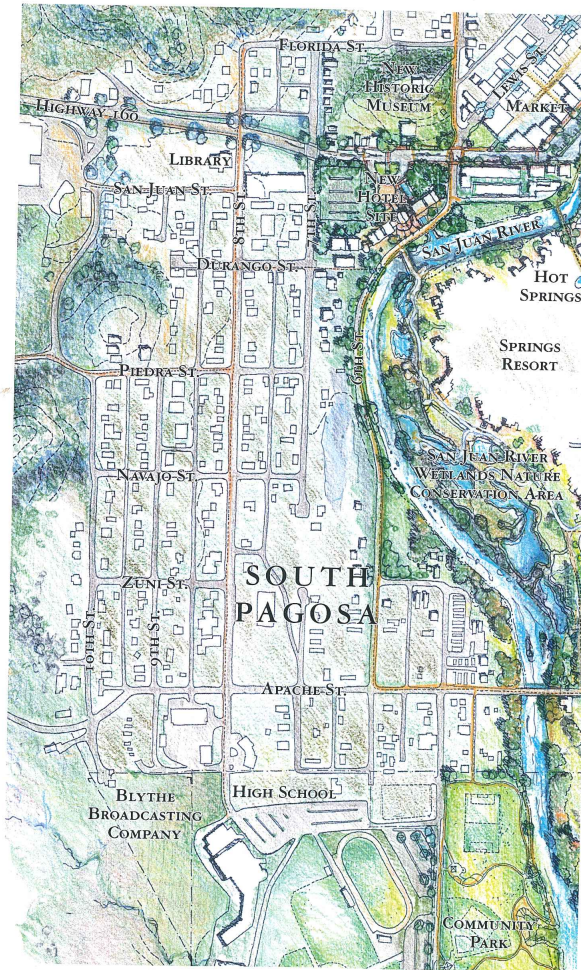
### Southern Neighborhood

This large neighborhood of about fifty small blocks is defined by Highway 160 to the north, the High School grounds to the south, the San Juan River to the east and the Elementary School site to the west. Built in the early days of the town's evolution, the neighborhood provides much appreciated affordable housing for many residents. Presently the neighborhood is in transition; the planning team has identified the following opportunities for improvements:

- a. Some vacant lots could be developed for added housing.
- b. The Town may wish to create a neighborhood park on a centrally located vacant site.
- c. Eighth Street might be recognized as an important access route to the High School, with clearly marked bike lanes, landscaping and lighting.
- d. The unpopular, narrow Sixth Street might be converted into a scenic riverfront trail that provides convenient bicycle access to the High School.

The town would benefit from preservation, further development and upgrading of the historic neighborhood. Related recommendations include:

- Preserve the existing single-family detached character of the area.
- Establish means for low-cost financing of improving the aging or substandard housing stock.
- Improve, complete and landscape the streets and paths throughout the neighborhood.
- Build a neighborhood park designed to serve residents.
- Plan for gradual acquisition and transfer of properties south of Apache Street for building a new Bus Barn and to make room for a community swimming pool by relocating the school parking there.





## EXPANDED TOWN AND COUNTY COMPLEX

The Town Hall and associated Community Center introduce new life – and a welcome destination – to Hot Springs Blvd. With plans to move the County offices to a site across Town Hall, the community might pursue the following *opportunities*:

- a. Creation of a new “Civic Center.”
- b. Developing complementary professional offices.
- c. Coordinated site planning of public and supporting private development.
- d. Creation of a welcoming destination at the south end of Hot Springs Blvd.
- e. Creation of a southern entry gateway designed to greet future residents of subdivisions already platted to the south.

In view of these opportunities, the planning team recommends that:

- As the Town will be ready to update Albert Moore & Partner’s plans for Hot Springs Blvd, it consider joint site planning of public and possible private development associated with the expanding Town and County complex.
- New development associated with the Town Hall and Community Center should be planned with the objective in mind to create pedestrian-friendly public spaces.
- The new complex should be tied to the trail systems associated with the San Juan River, Reservoir Hill and the Springs Resort.

## RESERVOIR HILL RECREATION AREA

The 120-acre town park atop the mesa represents a great recreational resource to Pagosa Springs. The mesa is popular with locals as an easily accessible “wilderness park.” The heavily wooded park also enhances the community’s identity. The Town plans to practically double the size of the park by acquiring an adjacent undeveloped property to the east.

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Opportunities associated with this outdoor recreational amenity are:

- Gradual implementation of a planned network of informal wilderness trails.
- Enrichment of winter recreation activities through snow play and perhaps a rope tow.
- Expansion of the Town Park through acquisition of contiguous private lands.

Planners' vision for the expanded town park includes:

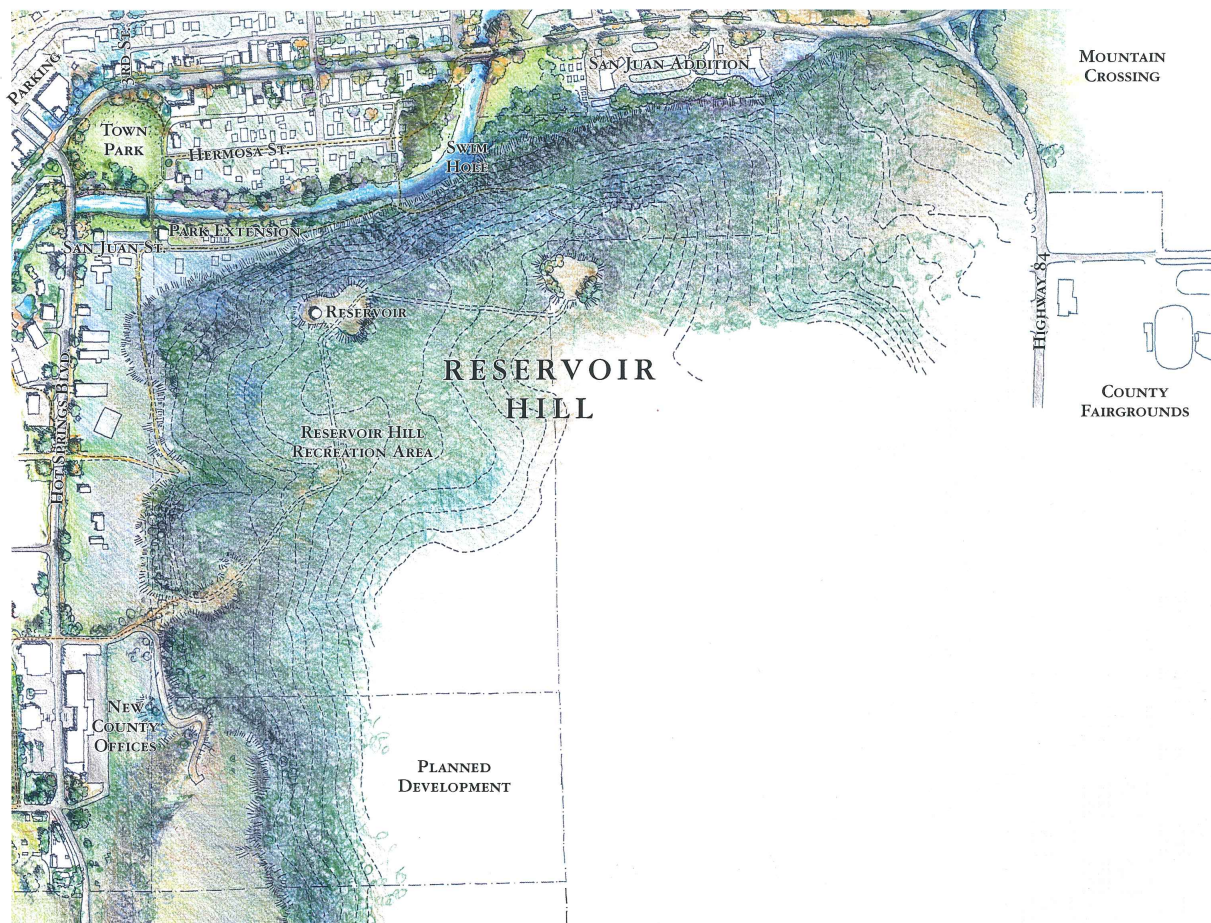
- Preserve the park's informal character.
- Provide better access to the park from nearby districts.
- Improve signage that invites visitors to the park.
- Create a lookout that provides views of the river valley and the community below.
- Manage the park to assure that it maintains its health and character in the future.

### CIRCULATION AND PARKING

The competitive position of downtown Pagosa Springs and the quality of life in the community depend on unhindered, safe vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian circulation and the availability of ample, convenient parking.

The Conceptual Plan responds to the following *needs* related to traffic and parking identified by the planning team:

- Facilitate slow through traffic while also responding to pedestrians' need for safely get about in downtown Pagosa Springs.
- Minimize the psychological and physical barrier that the wide and busy Highway 160 represents between two parts of the central business district.
- Provide for convenient short-term auto parking for business customers.
- Create long-term parking for downtown employees' vehicles, within reasonable walking distance to their work places.



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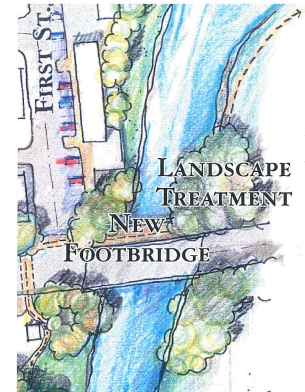
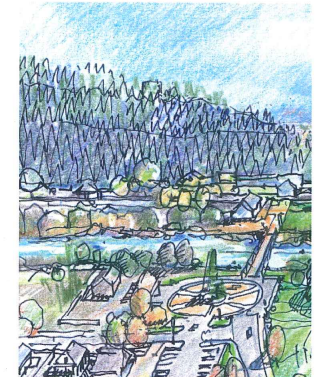
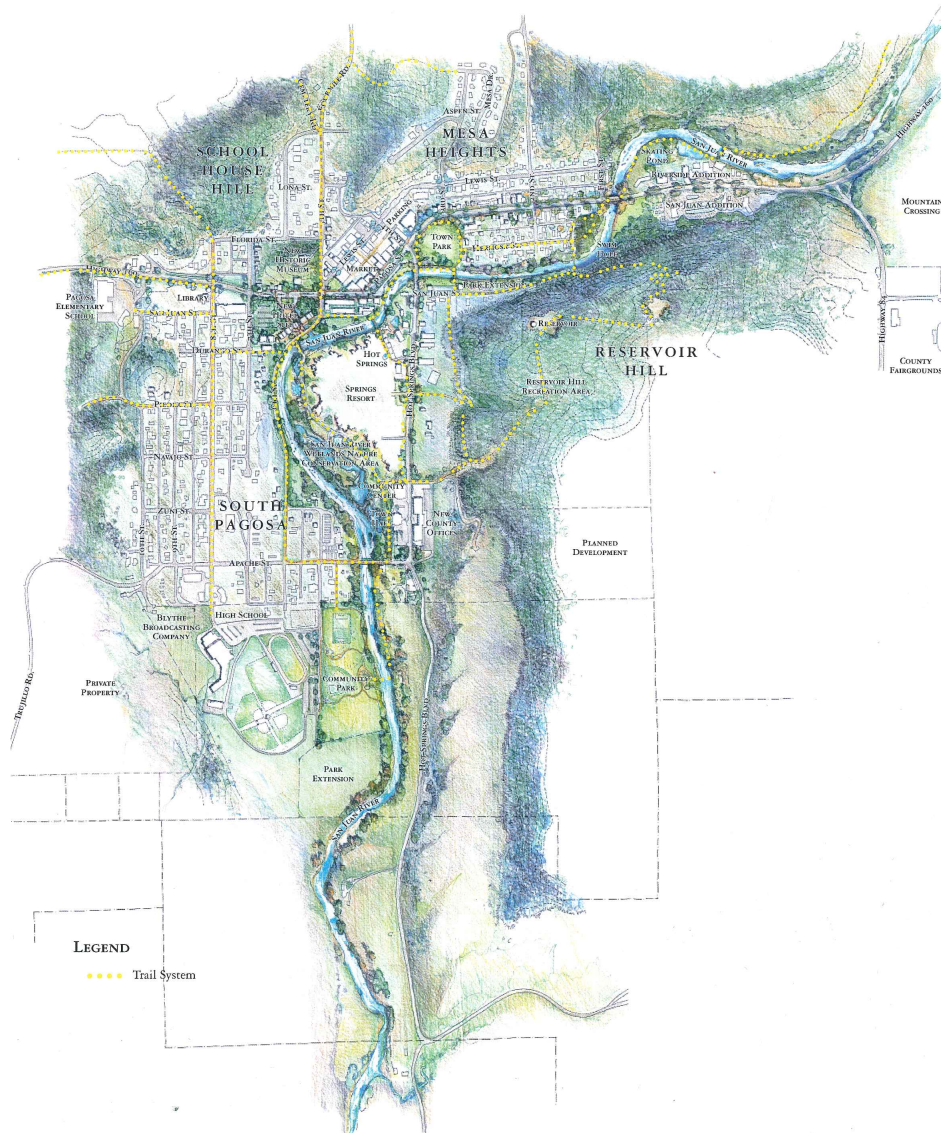
TRAILS

The local Trails Committee prepared a plan for a network of trails that serve as functional links between destinations. Depending on options for identifying appropriate rights-of-way, the trails are routed along streets, alleys and other forms of public open space. A number of trails – especially those associated with the San Juan River and the Town Park on Reservoir Hill also offer scenic experiences.

In reviewing results of the Community Survey and discussing priorities for expanding the evolving, limited trail system with the Community Vision Council, the planning team noted some preferences. The three most popular *priorities* are:

- a. Completing scenic trails along the San Juan River corridor.
- b. Connecting the schools (including the High School!) with residential neighborhoods.
- c. Providing better trail access to Reservoir Hill.

It will not be easy to achieve these objectives; the river corridor passes through areas that represent various obstacles to building trails. The most important obstacles are: Private property, steep topography, sensitive riparian wetlands and flood plains. With the exception of steep cliffs, most of these obstacles can be overcome with negotiations and/or with money, and success with applying those two tools and resources will be just a question of perseverance over time. Trails always have champions in communities, and Pagosa Springs is not an exception in this regard.



## SCHOOLS

### The Campus Concept

Early consultations with local sources brought to light the desire to explore potential merits and feasibility of relocating local schools to a common site, in a loose “campus” setting. Proponents of the “campus” concept see numerous advantages of a shared school site. By combining the Junior High, Intermediate and Elementary Schools within a single educational campus the community would benefit several ways:

- a. The School District would not incur repeated expenses related to maintenance and upkeep of the Junior High School.
- b. Parents and school buses would not have to deliver pupils to schools located in different areas, effecting considerable savings in time and resources.
- c. A combined school campus would provide better recreational opportunities for children of all ages.
- d. The replaced school facilities and school sites might serve other vital functions toward revitalizing downtown Pagosa Springs.
- e. With some expansion, the large High School site might be suitable for creating a combined school campus. The site might be expanded to the west, and – in the distant future – also to the north. A logical dividing line between the school campus and the neighborhood to the north might be at Apache Street.

At its August 18, 2004 work session, the Council suggested that the School Board consider potential merits of a combined school campus before it proceeds with building a new school Bus Depot in the heart of the High School site.

While the 70+ acre High School site is at the southern periphery of downtown Pagosa Springs, the Junior High School and the Intermediate School are in the heart of it, on Fourth and Lewis Streets. Of the two school buildings, the Intermediate School represents potential long-term value, important for preserving the small town’s identity. The Junior School site could serve strategic purposes in revitalizing the Central Business District.



RENEWED HISTORIC DOWNTOWN PAGOSA SPRINGS  
CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN



The Elementary School, situated on the junction of Tenth Street and Highway 160 represents the western limits of the historic downtown area. While the nearby Bus Barn will be moved to a new site, the school will remain in its present location.

At their first joint work session with the Council, Hart Howerton presented two alternative diagrams for a combined school campus. Alternative 'A' proposed expansion on private lands, to the west. Alternative 'B' accommodated all schools within the High School and proposed Town Park site. The Council preferred expansion to the west, in consideration of the town's commitment to building the new park.

In case the School District elects pursuing the combined school campus concept, school planners would have to address the following tasks:

- Creative re-planning of the expanded School Campus and its vicinity to accommodate Junior High, Intermediate (and perhaps Elementary) Schools there.
- Purchase of adjacent property to the west.
- Educational /recreational uses on neighboring private property to the west.
- Potential expansion of athletic/play areas to the west and to the south.
- Accommodation of a new School Bus Barn at the campus' periphery.
- Consideration of a community swimming pool on the High School site.
- Accommodation of the increased peak traffic flow.

### The Chosen Approach

The "campus" concept represents a departure from most School Districts' general practice of building schools on separate sites. Exposure to this concept initiated a process within the School District to re-evaluate adequacy of the various schools and to identify the community's future needs for educational and youth recreational facilities. Led by Ms. Lisa Scott, the School District's Vision Task Force got to work and is preparing plans for the future.

Those plans involve eventual replacement of the Junior High School and the Intermediate School buildings at new sites.

