

SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

Developers say no timeline yet for cathedral project

El Paso firm says details for land will emerge in next few months

[Julie Ann Grimm The New Mexican](#)

Jan 30, 2008



Alexander Usatine/The New Mexican

Cathedral Baslica of St. Francis of Assisi proposed redevelopment area

Alexander Usatine/The New Mexican

Julie Ann Grimm

Texas developers who leased downtown land owned by the Archdiocese of Santa Fe say it will likely be a few more months before detailed plans emerge for hotels, homes and retail uses on the property.

Preliminary discussions of the project to redevelop 5.5 acres adjacent to the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Asissi last year generated sometimes heated public debate. Now that planners have an idea of the "building envelope" that the city will allow on what is now mostly parking lots, local consultant Jennifer Jenkins said planners are working on specifics.

Although the archdiocese wanted approval for a taller, more dense development, she said, the city's Historic Design Review Board ultimately required that 55 percent of the new buildings be only one story tall, with no more than 30 percent of buildings rising two stories and a maximum of 15 percent at three stories.

During the early review process, the church had been working in partnership with El Paso's Hunt Development Corp. but has since leased the land to the group for 99 years. Hunt will redevelop the area bounded by Paseo de Peralta, Alameda Street, Cathedral Place and the old St. Vincent hospital building.

In addition to a large surface-parking area managed by the city, the property has several buildings, including the former St. Francis Cathedral School, two historic buildings used by the church for offices and a museum. None of those existing structures will be demolished, Jenkins noted.

The archdiocese still plans to build a new Parrish Hall next to the cathedral, but that isn't under Hunt's purview, she said.

Hunt vice president Jim Dobbie said in an interview that he didn't have a timeline for the project nor a picture of how the land would be divided into lodging and other uses.

"We have just begun our very preliminary outreach and really want to reconnect with the neighborhood groups and the preservationists in town that there was a lot of dialogue with earlier," he said. "Everything is sort of fresh, and we are going to be operating in that very informal capacity for a few months."

Approvals of the project's details must come from the Business Capital District Development Review Committee and the Planning Commission. The Historic Design Review would also review the architectural design and site plan, Jenkins said.

Early in the review process, archdiocese officials said revenue generated by the downtown real-estate development would help pay off a \$12 million construction loan for the Santo Niño Regional Catholic School, built just south of the city. The church currently is asking county government to approve the sale of \$10 million in tax-exempt education facility revenue bonds to help repay the construction loan.

Santa Fe County granted the archdiocese preliminary approval for the bonds in November. A hearing and formal vote is scheduled for the County Commission's Feb. 12 meeting. If the commission approves, the county would act as an agent, said county spokesman Stephen Ulibarri. Bonds would be sold on the public market, and the proceeds would go to the archdiocese, which would repay the debt through the county, he said.

At the time of the preliminary approval, archdiocese financial director Tony Salgado said revenue from the lease on the downtown real estate would be used to make debt payments.

Contact Julie Ann Grimm at 986-3017 or jgrimm@sfnewmexican.com.