



# South Academy Economic Opportunity Zone Action Plan

February 25, 2014

FIGURE 2

# Contributors

## Solutions Team

Fred Veitch, Nor'wood Development- Lead  
Tiffany Colvert, NAI Highland- Chair  
Merv Bennett, CS City Council- Co-Chair

Bill Cherrier, Colorado Springs Utilities  
Cindy Newsome, Colorado Springs Utilities  
Dan Lewis, State Farm Insurance  
Dan Rodriguez, Madsen Real Estate Group  
DeAnne McCann, El Paso County Economic Development, El Paso County Housing Authority  
Elena Nunez, Colorado Springs Utilities  
Greg Kaufman, Cushman Wakefield  
Gerrit Slater, Matrix Design Group  
Jan Doran, Council of Neighbors and Organizations  
Jeff Greene, County Administrator  
Joe Barrera, Black and Latino Coalition  
John Wilson, CS Business Alliance  
Kyle Campbell, Classic Consulting  
Matt Craddock, Craddock Commercial  
Mike Helwege- Cushman Wakefield  
Rick Hoover, Council of Neighbors and Organizations  
Tim Seibert, N.E.S. Inc.  
Vince Colarelli, Colarelli Construction

## City of Colorado Springs Staff

Aimee Cox, Senior Economic Vitality Specialist  
Bob Cope, Principal Analyst Economic Development  
Carl Schueler, Comprehensive Planning Manager  
Craig Blewitt, Transit Services Manager  
Karen Palus, Director of Parks and Recreation  
Kathleen Krager, City Traffic Engineer  
Peter Wysocki, Planning & Development Director

## Colorado Springs City Council

Helen Collins, District 4  
Jill Gaebler, District 5  
Merv Bennett, At Large

## El Paso County Commissioners

Amy Lathen, District 2  
Dennis Hisey, District 4  
Peggy Littleton, District 5

## The Problem

South and Central Academy Blvd. lacks a sense of place and community. It is cluttered with overhead transmission lines, concrete medians, minimal landscaping, and a hodgepodge of building styles, billboards and signage. Vacant buildings are commonplace, and many structures are deteriorating and in disrepair. Higher crime rates and the perception of crime negatively impact the area, there is a deficiency of quality jobs and primary employers, and transportation, connectivity and access is inefficient. Generally, this area is missing many of the fundamental elements that make a great community.

## The Purpose

This report is designed to be a workable action plan and implementation strategy for the both the public and private sector to best encourage and accelerate redevelopment along South Academy Blvd.

## The Process

Over the course of many months a solutions team, which was comprised of residents and business owners from the area, as well as community, business and civic leaders, came together to discuss, analyze and formulate the recommendations found within this action plan.

## The Recommendations

Due to the size, population and complexity of the entire strategy area, the solution team recommends focusing on four catalyst areas (Rustic Hills, Citadel, Fountain and Hancock) and executing projects in each that which will have the greatest impact and opportunities for value capture. These game changing projects will create the momentum needed to spark change in the entire corridor. Below are a list of the overall recommendations, through the report these are describe in greater detail and outlined in the implementation matrix at the end of the report.

- Bury overhead powers and transmission lines throughout corridor, to begin in catalyst areas
- Designated an area, or each catalyst area, as a Community Development Block Grant strategy area
- Initiate and expand community cleanup programs
- Establish and enforce design standards
- Align and create a full movement signalized intersection at Portal Dr.
- Relocate primary bus transfer station east of Citadel Mall onto Academy Blvd. and enhance service
- Support 2014 Hancock intersection improvements plan and then fund recommended design
- Connect surrounding neighborhoods to the corridor
- Further expand the Enterprise Zone
- Develop an expanded policy to defer connection and associated utility fees
- Kick off business retention and strategy meetings
- Encourage and incentivize a pharmacy/ grocer to locate in the Rustic Hills neighborhood
- Research the relocation or expansion of the City Senior Center
- Explore, engage and further community policing programs
- Increase police presence
- Coordinate with Citadel Mall management and key property owners to tackle crime and safety concerns
- Engage Colorado Springs Utilities meter check program
- Support targeted tax incentives for game changing projects
- Coordinate with Local Housing Authorities to promote existing programs
- Explore feasibility of satellite, mobile or other enhanced access program to Citizens Service Center
- Develop and improve public spaces, parks, community centers, etc.
- Support local farmers and ethnic markets
- Promote ownership in community improvements
- Implement community public art program
- Develop a branding strategy for the corridor with a branded, informational website for the corridor
- Work with local media to positively promote area
- Implement an oversight and accountability group for the execution of these recommendations
- Designate a City project manager and implement an oversight and accountability group for the execution of these recommendations

# Contents

## Introduction and Background

- a. Purpose
- b. Reference and Related Documents
- c. Vision

## Implementation Boundaries

### Catalyst Areas

- a. Rustic Hills
  - a. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
  - b. Recommended Actions
- b. Citadel
  - a. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
  - b. Recommended Actions
- c. Fountain
  - a. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
  - b. Recommended Actions
- d. Hancock
  - a. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
  - b. Recommended Actions

### Corridor Wide

Challenges and Opportunities, Strategy and Recommendations

### Additional Implementation Strategies

### Implementation Matrix

### Appendices:

- a. Rustic Hills Catalyst Area Map
- b. Citadel Catalyst Area Map
- c. Fountain Catalyst Area Map
- d. Hancock Catalyst Area Map

# Introduction and Background

## Purpose

Years ago South Academy Blvd. was the place to be. It was a thriving corridor with a myriad of shopping options, restaurant choices and an overall good quality of life. But over the years, the city sprawled eastward and South Academy Blvd. got left behind and mostly forgotten. Until now.

In the spring of 2013, Mayor Steve Bach announced the formation of a Solutions Team to focus on strategies to revitalize his Economic Opportunity Zones (EOZs), of which South Academy is included. In his 2014 budget, Mayor Bach set the following goals for these EOZs as part of his strategic plan:

"1.2 Focus on Economic Opportunity Zones (EOZ) (Downtown, North Nevada/UCCS Corridor, South Academy)

- A. Establish a stakeholder task force to conduct SWOT analyses to determine impediments to redevelopment in Economic Opportunity Zones and develop strategies for mitigating these impediments.
- B. With the stakeholder task force, craft a vision and redevelopment strategy for each EOZ and define specific outcomes.
- C. Identify anchor projects that stimulate infill development and realize the vision in each EOZ.
- D. Actively market and promote redevelopment of EOZ areas by reaching out to developer and broker communities
- E. Consider public and public-private funding options for implementing recommendations of the redevelopment strategy"

(2014 Budget, page xxi)"

The Solutions Team, which is comprised of volunteers, residents and business owners from the area, as well as community, business and civic leaders, have set out to identify strategies and actions to best encourage and accelerate redevelopment. The result is this action plan- an implementation strategy to guide both public and private efforts.

## Reference and Related Documents

This document is not intended to be another study or report. Rather, it is a set of actionable recommendations. The following documents have been utilized as a basis for the recommendations made here within:

**Academy Boulevard Corridor Great Streets Plan** – it is strongly encouraged and recommended that this plan be reviewed to adequately gain a context for this implementation plan.

<http://www.springsgov.com/Page.aspx?NavID=4264>

City's Comprehensive Plan, Land Use Vision Plan, Existing Land



## Vision

To promote, support and adaptively redevelop the Academy Blvd. corridor as a Great Street with access to alternative modes of transportation, public/private investment in business and residential development, and enhanced connectivity with the street, between land uses, and with neighborhoods.

To spark a revitalization of the Academy Blvd. corridor by reconnecting to surrounding neighborhoods physically, socially, and economically — making the area relevant and desirable.

Our vision is for Academy Blvd. to be the heart of a safe, clean, attractive, neighborhood of choice that celebrates its diversity in terms of race, ethnic background, incomes, age, and other measures. Its scale, character, physical appearance, public realm, and mix of uses are designed to serve the needs, and engage the lives of the community.

## Implementation Boundaries



The South Academy Economic Opportunity Zones is defined as a 12 square mile area of Academy Blvd. from Maizeland Rd. on the north and Drennan Rd. on the south extending 1 mile wide to each side of Academy Blvd. This area accounts for approximately 15 percent of the City's population.

Key attributes of the planning area include above average shopping center and office vacancy rates, high crime rates, and demographically the area is considerably more diverse than the overall City

\* Please reference the Great Streets Plan for a full demographic profile of the area.

**FIGURE 2**

## Catalyst Areas

Given the size, population and complexity of this overall EOZ, the Solution Team recommends focusing particular attention on specific sub-areas that have some combination of a strong potential for redevelopment, special needs, ongoing inertia and/or definitive and actionable options. These areas are:

**Rustic Hills | Citadel | Fountain Boulevard | Hancock Expressway**

The generalized boundaries of these areas are depicted in the maps found in the appendix at the end of this report. Please also reference the implantation matrix at the end of this report in regards to recommended actions.

### Rustic Hills

This subarea is centered on and encompasses the two Rustic Hills Malls south of Constitution Avenue and including intersection of Palmer Park Boulevard and Academy.

This area represents unique opportunity because the Rustic Hills North Shopping Center (north of Palmer Park Boulevard) is almost entirely vacant at this time and is in fairly poor physical condition. It, and the surrounding properties, therefore have the potential for redevelopment as a truly special “game changing” and innovative project that could serve as the community focal point for surrounding primarily single-family neighborhoods that were originally developed in the 1950s and 60’s. Over the coming years, much of the older population of these neighborhoods will continue to be replaced by younger or newer residents. A successful project would be predicated on property acquisition and assembly by a motivated developer along with a commitment of City support.



#### Strengths

- Central location in large trade area
- Limited but active reinvestment south of Palmer Park Blvd has occurred
- The area has proximity to two major trail corridors
- Redevelopable property could be available in this area with a fairly low basis

#### Weaknesses

- High commercial vacancies combined with some low value/transitional leasing activity
- Visibility of the Rustic Hills North Shopping Center from Academy Boulevard and other arterial roadways is relatively poor
- At this point the area is relatively unattractive to those young families and young professionals with options for living and/or working elsewhere
- Current reinvestment activity north of Palmer Park Boulevard is limited
- There is poor connectivity with single-family neighborhoods and Homestead Trail/ Creek east of shopping centers and an uninviting transition between uses
- Limited availability of public parks and desirable public places in the immediate vicinity of this node

## Opportunities

- Relatively unified mall ownerships could simply land assembly for redevelopment/ reinvestment projects
- Potentially available acreage sufficient to support one or more significant and impactful projects
- Neighborhoods would likely support (or not oppose) a wide range of options
- Poor condition and limited current uses in Rustic Hills North Mall provide an opportunity for substantial redevelopment
- There is potential for creation of a unique public or semi-public place within this node.
- The immediate area encompassing one or both of the malls would certainly qualify for urban renewal area designation if there were a value added project identified.
- Possibilities exist for enhanced trail connections
- There is potential for reconstruction of the fire station
- A broadly encompassing overall or form based (FBZ) zoning plan could be developed and adopted for this area to reduce the regulatory entitlement period for a wider choice of land uses while at the same time instituting agreed-upon enhances standards for design elements and integration with the public realm

## Threats

- There is potential for further fragmentation of ownerships and/or introduction of uses that could inhibit or complicate redevelopment
- The current owners of largely vacant properties may be unwilling to sell to new owners at a price conducive to supporting cost-effective redevelopment
- Further erosion of market fundamentals could occur depending on socioeconomic trends in the local trade area
- There is potential for related school quality and/or public safety concerns that could frustrate reinvestment

## Recommended Actions

- Focus some Code enforcement attention on the immediate area of Rustic Hills North Mall especially if the buildings continue to deteriorate.
- Hire a consultant to perform a site-specific market study for this area focusing on the demand for a grocery store and pharmacy.
- Convene a group of City, County, Colorado Springs Utilities, health care, agency and non-profit representatives, to systematically determine whether there is a demand for and interest in incorporation of their programs and facilities as part of a public-private project at this location.
- Systematically evaluate the existing CSU Utilities capacity to serve a potential public/private project at this location and identify any known limitation or cost including potential need for relocation constraints created by easements, reconnection cost etc.
- Possibly sponsor a redesign charette process with notice to major property owners and the community.

---

## Citadel

This sub-area encompasses the greater Citadel Mall property as well as the Citadel Crossing Shopping Center and immediately surrounding areas.

The Citadel Mall area has been and continues to be the major activity center within this EOZ, and functions as a major employment center. Maintaining its vitality will be essential to the community health of the larger surrounding core of the City. The large size of the Citadel Mall area, its complex ownership pattern, and its multiple existing and often viable uses make it difficult for the City to have a prominent role in “game changing” redevelopment of this area, at this time. Therefore, the most productive role of the City should be focusing on improving the public realm and access to automotive, non-motorized transit and traffic, all to support continued adaptation of uses in this area to meet and grow the demands of an evolving market.

## Strengths

- Area continues to be a major employment center, with fairly high rates of occupancy
- Malls and adjacent properties support a wide range of uses including retail, offices, professional, education and services
- High traffic volumes from major roadways



## Weaknesses

- Citadel Mall enclosed design is dated and not outwardly appealing
- Narrow strip configuration of Citadel Crossing creates a variety of challenges including vehicular access, pedestrian connectivity within the center and connectivity from it to surrounding areas
- Physical and perceptual access from Platte Avenue is limited and unappealing
- The Platte Avenue interchange is particularly unappealing and not conducive to local access
- Multiple and inter-related ownerships of Citadel Mall and adjacent properties could make land assembly and/or coordination for redevelopment difficult.
- Transit center on west side of Citadel Mall is not well located to support efficient in-line transit service along Academy or Platte
- Limited high quality parks and public places in the vicinity



## Opportunities

- "Excess capacity" is available in some of the parking areas with the Citadel Mall
- Shorter term opportunities for location specific redevelopment projects including the potential to adapt one of Mall anchors to make it more outwardly facing
- Potential for adaptation of part of this sub-area to support a major medical or educational use
- Potential for construction of unique housing projects with pedestrian access to current and potential future Mall.
- Longer term opportunities for a larger scale multiple/mixed use project in the area, including the potential for substantial adaptation and/or reconstruction
- Medium term opportunity to locate a state-of-the art transit center along Academy Boulevard
- Shorter term potential to directly interconnect the Citadel Mall and Citadel Crossing via a full movement access at Portal Drive
- Longer term option to reconstruct the Platte avenue interchange with a modern more inwardly focused design that is more compatible with land uses in the vicinity

## Threats

- Continued competition from retail uses in other and more recently developing areas may make it more difficult for this traditional regional center to continue to draw customers from as large a market area.
- The combination of a complex ownership pattern and relatively high rates of leasing and absorption could make it difficult to stimulate coordinated redevelopment planning and implementation, thereby contributing to a pattern and acceptance of gradual overall aging and decline
- There is potential for further erosion of market fundamentals depending on socioeconomic trends in the core Colorado Springs trade area

## Recommended Actions

- Privately funded non-traditional and mixed uses and redevelopment projects should generally be encouraged in this area especially if they contribute to its ongoing viability, diversity employment and improve the public realm.
- Limited tax incentives (such a sales tax sharing agreements) should be supported for significant retail and/or employment investments in the area, especially if there are enhancements to the public realm and a tie to longer term performance (e.g. if a new tenant/owner of the vacant Macy's space came forward with a plan to adaptively redesign rather than simply fill that space).
- Portal Drive in the Citadel Mall should be lined up to connect with Citadel Crossing with a full movement intersection, as a publically funded project.
- City Transit Services should pursue grant funding for and then initiate a siting and preliminary design study directed toward relocating the existing Citadel Mall transfer station to a location in-line on Academy Boulevard (most likely at NW corner of Platte and Academy). The preliminary site and design should preferably fit within City-owned right of way and incorporate pedestrian connectivity (including across Academy Boulevard).

**FIGURE 2**

---

## Fountain Boulevard

The Fountain Boulevard sub-area encompasses the properties surrounding the intersection of Fountain Boulevard and Academy primarily including office uses of various types, but also some retail and automobile sales uses.

This is the primary professional employment center within the EOZ, with most of the “Class A” office space. Much of the infrastructure, access, and entitlements are already in place to accommodate additional uses. However, a number of high profile employers (such as General Dynamics) have moved from the area, existing office vacancy rates are high, and there is a substantial amount of vacant property that has persistently remained undeveloped. There is definitely a concern with public safety realities and perceptions especially with the Fountain/Chelton area immediately to the west. Some enhancement of access from Academy Boulevard is already in the works. There have been long-standing plans to construct a grade-separated interchange at this location. However, the current thinking is that an at-grade intersection would be most supportive of economic development in this area.

### Strengths

- This area has a concentration of professional and/or primary employment uses to leverage from
- The area also has a base of higher quality office parks and office buildings in the vicinity
- There is a significant amount of vacant easily developable land with this node
- Utility capacity and roadway infrastructure is largely in place and available to support significant additional development

### Weaknesses

- There are no coordinated land use plans or design guidelines for the area, and many of the uses are not well integrated
- There are limited housing choices and amenities available in the immediately surrounding areas to support professional level employees (e.g. restaurants, hotels, signature public spaces)
- The uncertainty surrounding the future of grade-separated plans for the Academy Boulevard and Fountain intersection may be contributing to a lack of development investment
- The market potential for the immediate residential trade area may be limited due to its socioeconomic characteristics
- Pedestrian connectivity is generally limited within the area



### Opportunities

- Land with facilities largely in place to support development of a variety of mixed and preferably integrated uses
- There is an opportunity for reassessing the future need for a grade-separated interchange at this location and subsequently implementing an improved design for an at-grade intersection with enhanced multi-modal access
- This process would need to occur in coordination with CDOT
- Specialized and unique higher density and more street-oriented housing projects could be designed, incentivized, and implemented within this node

### Threats

- Significant primary and professional employers (particularly defense contractors) could continue to vacate the area; thereby undermining its potential to develop as an employment and activity center
- Continued high office vacancy rates would create an impediment to associated new development
- Continued concerns with crime and violence in proximity to this area (e.g. area of Fountain and Chelton) could put a damper on interest in reinvestment for this area

## Recommended Actions

- Coordinate one or more meetings among the Mayor, City Council representatives and the Regional Business Alliance with major primary employers and building owners in this area with a focus on the most important steps needed to support business retention and expansion.
- Continue to work with and support residents, business owners and CSPD on initiatives such as the Fountain & Chelton Partnership with the purpose of systematically and aggressively attacking the high incidence of crime in the immediate Fountain/ Chelton area.
- Initiate conversations with CDOT to re-evaluate the need for a grade-separated interchange at City of Fountain and Academy Boulevard; then fund a study and intersection design process with objectives that would include the support and enhancement of business and community development in this area.

---

## Hancock Expressway

The Hancock Expressway sub-area encompasses the properties surrounding the intersection of Hancock Expressway and Academy including the four retail or formerly retail corners as well as adjacent vacant and developable properties.

This is one of the key redevelopment nodes identified in the 2011 Great Streets Plan. Funding and plans are also underway to accomplish a planning and design study for this intersection beginning in 2014. This process could be used to 'pilot' some of the approaches and solutions with transferability to other parts of the corridor.



## Strengths

- Substantial vacant developable land is available
- The basis in many of the existing properties is fairly low; thereby reducing financial barriers to entry, and potentially allowing investment dollars to be available for property enhancements.
- From I-25 south, this is and will be the entry point for the City
- This area is close and easily accessible to Fort Carson, South I-25, the Airport and Pikes Peak Community College
- Military and civilian employment at Fort Carson should remain relatively stable in the near future
- Utility capacity is generally available to support substantial additional development within this node.

## Weaknesses

- The existing intersection design limits access to properties in this node, is visually unwelcoming, not conducive to pedestrian use and does not support accessible high quality transit facilities
- Overhead transmission lines (both north/south and east/west) are unattractive and their associated easements contribute to the 'perceptual width' of the intersection and limit the potential to construct buildings closer to the roadway
- Much of the population of this immediate trade area is relatively young, transient and with limited disposable incomes
- This area is considered to be "over-retailed" at least for traditional retail uses, and in particular a market does not and most likely will not exist for all three of the grocery stores that were operating at this location at one point in time
- Some of the apartments in the area would be considered a dated and less desirable product.
- The area does not have a highly favorable reputation at this time due to combination of a factors including perceptions of crime and lack of confidence in property values

### **Opportunities**

- The relative and diversity youth of the area's population could be leveraged for unique land use and marketing opportunities
- In process plans to first design and then construct a modern at-grade intersection at this location should increase vehicular access to this node and make it more attractive to development
- If feasible and cost-effective, associated options to underground overhead utilities would further contribute to a more aesthetically pleasing location for redevelopment and allow for a more street-oriented development pattern
- Significant funds are identified in PPRTA and in the approved PPACG Long Range Plan with which to reconstruct portions of Academy Boulevard in this vicinity
- One or more corners of this intersection could be redeveloped with a mixed use approach and theme which would celebrate the cultural diversity of this area
- This area would certainly qualify for urban renewal area designation if one or more value enhancing projects were identified and the URA (Urban Renewal Authority) and City were so support such a designation
- The area also qualifies for a wide variety of incentives including Enterprise Zone tax credits, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding and various housing programs
- A broadly encompassing overall or form based (FBZ) zoning plan could be developed and adopted for this area to reduce the regulatory entitlement period for a wider choice of land uses while at the same time instituting agreed-upon enhances standards for design elements and integration with the public realm.

### **Threats**

- Under the status quo option, there is a likely potential that area-wide sustained economic redevelopment will not occur
- If the unincorporated South Academy Station development occurs as planned just to the west of Academy Boulevard and I-25, this could further detract from the retail market for this activity center in particular
- Area business and other property owners may be unwilling or unable to make the financial commitments necessary to support full implementation of redevelopment
- -For example they might be unwilling to support a maintenance district needed to take care of publically funded improvements
- Environmental concerns associated with the closed landfill could impact the continued development or redevelopment of the northwest quadrant of this node.

### **Recommended Actions**

- Support the 2014 Hancock Intersection /Academy Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) consultant process which has the objective of comprehensively redesigning this intersection to support access to, and redevelopment of this area.
- With the concurrence of owners, apply for and obtain grant funding from EPA or another agency to further characterize and recommend mitigation strategies for the closed landfill that is currently encumbering several otherwise developable properties northwest of Academy Boulevard and Hancock Expressway.

## Central Challenges and Themes

While the Solutions Team suggest focusing on the four catalyst areas for the greatest overall impact, there are a number of overarching challenges and themes throughout the area that need to be addressed.

The recommendations for the catalyst areas are design to create an immediate result, visual impact or specific result that will likely spur further redevelopment and act as a stimulus. The challenges that are central to the corridor as whole need to be approached more holistically. Many of the themes are interconnected and as one improves gradually all will be improved. It is a combination of these incremental changes that will overtime change the entire area.

Reference the Implementation Matrix for specific action items, timeframes and possible funding sources, and people and agencies to involve.



FIGURE 2

---

# 1. Challenge

*Corridor is blighted and is a poor representation of the city.*

South Academy Blvd. is cluttered with overhead transmission and power lines, concrete medians, minimal landscaping, and a hodgepodge of billboards and signage. Vacant buildings are deteriorating and in disrepair. There is no continuity or character, or sense of place.

## Opportunity

There is huge opportunity for beautification of the area through streetscape improvements, grounding of transmission lines, implementation of design standards, façade improvements and greening the public right of way.

## Strategy and Recommendation

### City to actively pursue funding for burying utility lines

Target each catalyst area's intersections as a priority. Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU) has the ability to pay 50% of the cost to underground overhead power lines. An alternate funding source will have to be identified to address the remaining costs for burying utility lines. For this we recommend looking into the possibility of using Community Development Block Grant Funds, Safe Routes to School Grants, etc.

### Designate area as a Community Development Block Grant strategy area and prioritize CDBG funding for improvements

Through the CDBG program many public improvements can be funded such as streetscape enhancements, public facility improvements, façade improvement programs, lighting, demolition and clean up, code enforcement, and more.

It is recommended that South Academy be made a priority for the use of CDBG funds. Additional Section 108 Loan Guarantees should be evaluated as a tool for larger scale projects.

### Initiate and Expand Community Clean Up Programs

Engage neighborhood organizations and community members to organize a number of community clean up days per year. City to possibly sponsor roll-off dumpsters for residents and businesses to dispose of yard debris, and other unwanted items that may be an eyesore to the community (old sofas on lawns. etc.) free of charge.

### Establish and Enforce Design Standards

Consider overlays for Land-Use. Determine and implement uniform setback requirements, signage requirements and overall design standards for new and existing buildings and users. Further enforce general code enforcement.



**FIGURE 2**

## 2. Challenge

**Current roadway and intersections discourage pedestrians and cyclists and are unsafe, with poor accessibility and connectivity.**

Academy Blvd. is currently classified as an expressway, however this doesn't align with current land uses and traffic patterns. There is an imbalance among through travel, local circulation and access. The neighborhoods do not connect with the corridor.

## Opportunity

Due to the changed nature of the corridor, from an express way to corridor with distinctive nodes (i.e. catalyst areas), there is a unique opportunity to create distinctive multi-modal neighborhoods. The possibility of creating a walkable, connected corridor is very feasible.

## Strategy and Recommendation

**Align and create a full movement signalized intersection at Portal Dr. (Citadel Mall / Citadel Crossing Intersection) to enhance vehicular and pedestrian access to both centers.**

The Citadel is a major center for activity and in the spirit of creating a major mixed-use destination at this location having cross access to the two centers will further enhance each center and create a sense of place. In addition, the streetscape concepts should be aimed to create a more walkable and comfortable environment. As depicted, the streetscape improvements would include additional street trees as well as the installation of monuments that could identify the Citadel area as a major destination along the corridor.



EXISTING CONDITION



CONCEPTUAL CONDITION

**Relocate Primary Bus Transfer Station on to Academy Blvd. and Enhance Services**

City Transit Services should pursue grant funding for, and then initiate a siting and preliminary design study directed toward relocating the existing Citadel Mall transfer station to a location in-line on Academy Boulevard (most likely at NW corner of Platte and Academy). The preliminary site and design should preferably fit within City-owned right of way and incorporate pedestrian connectivity (including across Academy Boulevard).

Additionally, pursue enhancements to fixed route transit service as funds allow. Routes 25 (Academy) and 5 (Platte/Boulder) represent 2/3rds of the recommended core "H-system" for the City, which is recommended for possible more frequent service.

## Support 2014 Hancock Intersection Interchange Improvements

Leverage current PPRTA & PPACG funds and further the Planning and Environmental Linkages consultant process which has the objective of comprehensively redesigning this intersection to support access improvements and redevelopment of this area.

Hancock Intersection Concept Prototype



## Connect Surrounding Neighborhoods to the Corridor

Incorporate walking and bike trails to and from the corridor into the surrounding neighborhoods. Integrate public spaces and natural buffers combined with ongoing streetscape improvements. Slow traffic and narrow roads, and consider reconfiguration of traffic signals to promote walkability and enhanced traffic flow.

# 3. Challenge

## High overall commercial vacancies

The South Academy corridor has above average vacancy rates for retail and office space in comparison to the rest of the City. Many structures are completely vacant and deteriorating, others are partially vacant, underutilized or suffering from obsolescence.

## Opportunity

High vacancy rates mean lots of potentially usable space. There is an opportunity here for more room for public and private development to occur. There is the ability to be creative in the adaptive reuse and repurposing of these buildings for a greater use. There are opportunities to attract new businesses and uses.

FIGURE 2



# Strategy and Recommendation

## Further Expansion of Enterprise Zone

The Enterprise Zone program provides incentives for new and established businesses to locate and expand in economically distressed areas of the State. Businesses in the Enterprise Zone may save thousands of dollars on their Colorado income tax bill each year for making capital investments, hiring new employees, providing training for employees, rehabilitating old buildings and conducting research & development.

It is recommend that classification of the corridor as an Enterprise Zone be explored and initiated if possible.

## CSU to Develop a Policy to Defer Connection and Associated Fees

Colorado Springs Utilities to develop a policy to defer connection and associated feed for projects located within the EOZ boundaries. In conjunction, explore the option of waiving CSU fees, such as waiving abandonment fees, and possible amortization of tap fees over time.



## Business Retention and Expansion Strategy Meetings

Coordinate one or more meetings among the Mayor, City Council and the Regional Business Alliance to strategize on the most important steps needed to support business retention and expansion, with specific emphasis on primary employers and major building owners within the corridor.

---

## 4. Challenge

### Underserved Senior Population

The South Academy corridor, specifically the Rustic Hills area, has an ever growing elderly population. The Solutions Team has identified this group to be in need of basic amenities within walking distance, additionally, better access to public transportation and services is a challenge. Engagement of this large segment of the population is critical to the success of the area.

### Opportunity

This is a possibility to engage, accommodate and enrich the lives a growing community of senior citizens. To efficiently provide services and access to daily needs, possibly through the creation of a senior village and wellness hub that will become a destination for all seniors in the city.

# Strategy and Recommendation

## Encourage and Incentivize a Pharmacy/ Grocer to be located in the Rustic Hills Neighborhood

The primary concentration of senior citizens in the area is in the Rustic Hills neighborhood. With the closing of the Albertsons Grocery and Longs Drugs at the Rustic Hills Shopping Center, there is very limited access to a pharmacy or a grocery store. While this may primarily be market-driven, the City and Colorado Springs Utilities can help promote and market development incentives for these users. The Regional Business Alliance might also be helpful in this process.

Business financing can potentially be supplemented with funds from the Colorado Fresh Food Financing Fund administer by CHFA.

## Research the possibility of an expansion or relocation of the City Senior Center



The Colorado Springs Senior Center, currently located in the 80903 Zip Code (between North Nevada and Union Blvd, currently has the majority of its members coming from the 80909 and 80910 Zip Codes. It is recommended that the City look into the potential and the feasibility of relocating the center, or possibly opening a second/satellite location within the Academy Corridor.

---

## 5. Challenge

### High Crime Rates

Crime rates in this area, measured on a per capita basis, are higher than City-wide averages by 30 to 50 percent. Concerns with both actual and perceived criminal activity need to be addressed in order to provide an incentive for private investment in the Corridor and to assure that public investments have their desired positive effect. There is also a perception that crime is a concern, along with a relative lack of community and neighborhood engagement.

## Opportunity

Crime reduction and public safety must be addressed as a community, this lends to the opportunity for community engagement. Encouraging business, residents, and community groups to work with the police, aids in crime reduction and enhanced public safety. Working together to modify the social and physical features of a target area in order to make them less attractive to criminals will further compound on the effort to reduce crime overall.

# Strategy and Recommendation

## Explore, Engage or Further Community Policing Programs

Programs such as Neighborhood Watch, Crime Stoppers, Police Assisted Community Enhancement, and educational programs have been proven to reduce crime and enhance public safety. It is recommended that the City seek out best practices and implement, and enhance a number of Community Policing Programs within the corridor. One such program in place is the Fountain & Chelton partnership.

## Explore Options to Increase Police Presence

While community policing programs are needed, there is no substitute for the physical presence of police. It is further recommended that the city increase the number of patrol units as well as the frequency of such patrols in the area.

## Work with Citadel Mall Management and Key Property Owners to Identify Key Issues

It has further been identified that the Citadel Mall in particular is a hub for crime, to best determine causes and develop solutions it is recommended that the City coordinate with Mall Management.

---

## 6. Challenge

### Lack of Primary Employers and Availability of Jobs in the Area

Overall, the planning area is a net exporter of workers because the area contains more people than there are available jobs. Employment in the planning area is concentrated in the retail and service sectors.

## Opportunity

With new public and private investment into the area there is an opportunity to attract and expand businesses that create quality jobs.

## Strategy and Recommendation

### Further Expansion of Enterprise Zone

The Enterprise Zone program provides incentives for new and established businesses to locate and expand in economically distressed areas of the State. Businesses in the Enterprise Zone may save thousands of dollars on their Colorado income tax bill each year for making capital investments, hiring new employees, providing training for employees, rehabilitating old buildings and conducting research & development.

### Actively engage Colorado Springs Utilities' Meter Check

Engage Colorado Springs Utilities' Meter Check Program to ensure meters on existing buildings with new uses are appropriately sized to avoid unnecessary monthly costs to building occupants/businesses

### CSU to Develop a Policy to Defer Connection and Associated Fees

Colorado Springs Utilities to develop a policy to defer connection and associated fees for projects located within the EOZ boundaries. In conjunction, explore the option of waiving CSU fees, such as waiving abandonment fees, and possible amortization of tap fees over time

### Support Limited Tax Incentives

Limited Tax Incentives, such as sales tax sharing agreements should be supported for significant employment and/or retail investments in the area, especially if there are enhancements to the public realm and tie to longer term performance.

### Business Retention and Expansion Strategy Meetings

Coordinate one or more meetings among the Mayor, City Council, and the Regional Business Alliance to strategize on the most important steps needed to support business retention and expansion, with specific emphasis on primary employers and major building owners within the corridor.

---

## 7. Challenge

### Aging Housing Stock and Affordability

The planning area has higher proportions of rentals than owner-occupied housing and a higher proportion of multi-family housing, especially in the Central sub-area, much of the housing stock is aging and in need of repair and upgrades. Additionally, newer housing options are offered at similar or lower prices out east and often detour movement into the area.

### Opportunity

The corridor has a large existing population and diverse housing options, there is a great opportunity to spur revitalization and modernize the housing stock, offer opportunities for housing rehabilitation, potentially attract more young professionals.



**FIGURE 2**

# Strategy and Recommendation

## Coordinate with local Housing Authorities and Housing Agencies to better market the available programs and resources

By working with the Colorado Springs Housing and the El Paso County Housing Authority, as well as local housing agencies, such as Greccio, Partners in Housing, Rocky Mountain Community Land Trust, and Habitat for Humanity, to better promote the incentives and housing assistance already available, residents will have better access such services.

## 8. Challenge

### Overall Lack of City and County Services in the Area

The relocation of the Citizens Service Center to Garden of Gods Road created a challenge in terms of ease of access to essential services, particularly in the southeast side of town. Total trip and travel time to the Citizens Service Center, depending on time of day, with public transportation can take upwards of 4 hours to complete.

## Opportunity

Service delivery is often a challenge faces by many agencies, however with that challenge comes the opportunity to get creative about access and service delivery, not along for the South Academy corridor, but the County as a whole.

# Strategy and Recommendation

## City/ County to explore the feasibility of either a satellite office for Citizens Services, the potential of mobile services or other enhanced access program.

Residents along the South Academy corridor need better access to essential services such as the Clerk and Recorder, Department of Motor Vehicles, Human Services and others. A central satellite office should be considered, however it is understood that the costs associated with real estate and staffing could be high. Other agencies such as Peak Vista and Care & Share have successful models of providing mobile service delivery; this option should be explored.



FIGURE 2

---

## 9. Challenge

### Unengaged Community and Lack of Sense of Place

While the South Academy Blvd. is one of the most diverse areas in the City it lacks a sense of place and community. There are no distinctive neighborhoods, community gathering places or mechanisms to unite the community.

### Opportunity

By playing off the strengths of the diversity of the area there is great potential to create neighborhoods and nodes with recognizable identities, connect the community and establish pride in the neighborhood

### Strategy and Recommendation

**Focus efforts on developing and improving public spaces, parks, community centers, community gardens, etc.**

It is recommended that the city plan to identify at least one project for each of the catalyst areas that could be implemented within the next 2 years. Each project, whether it be a park or community center should reflect the personality and unique character of the neighborhood that it is in. It is further suggested that community members also play a significant role in this process

**Encourage and support the development of farmers markets and various ethnic markets in the area**

The City should do all that it can to support seasonal farmers markets and ethnic markets in the area. Assisting local farmers and community groups in utilizing vacant parking lots (coordinating with land owners) and public spaces will help to create central gathering place. Also by supporting such activities the City not only helps to create a sense of community, but also helps to provide better access to healthy and fresh foods.

**Promote Community Ownership in area Improvements**

To help establish a sense of pride in the community it is important to have the community involved in creating the change. One way of doing so is by encouraging jobs that are created from local improvements to be filled by local residents. An example of this is the South YMCA. The contractor was asked to only employ people from the immediate area/zip code, and to date it is the only YMCA building in the County that has not been vandalized. By including and engaging the community as much as possible a sense of pride is created.

**Implement a Community Public Art Program**

To further build on the concept of creating pride in the area it is recommend that the City help to implement a public art program. This could include coordination with local schools, galleries and other community groups to select community artist and students to have their works installed throughout the corridor. A similar example of this is the UCCS art scholarship program that is integrated with the University Village Development, where students compete for small grants to build public art pieces that are then installed at the Shopping Center. This completes multiple objectives. It creates a sense of pride, place and community, and it aids in the beatification of the area.

## 10. Challenge

### General Perception of the Area is Poor

Currently South Academy has a stigma of blight and crime. People from other parts of the City generally avoid the area because they have a preconceived idea of what to expect. All the improvements and recommendations in this report won't mean much unless there is an effort to change perceptions and attract more people to the area.

## Opportunity

There is a unique opportunity to revive the area and give it a fresh start. In conjunction with all the recommendations in this report, a total re-branding and marketing strategy of the corridor is suggested. By developing a brand that creates sense of place, instills pride, and celebrates the neighborhood and its culture, all the other corridor improvements will be solidified and enhanced.

## Strategy and Recommendation

### Develop a Branding Strategy for the Area

Work with a local marketing agency to re-brand the corridor, possibly designing various campaigns that reflect the culture, feel and vision for each catalyst area neighborhoods. Through the use of colors, a name, a tag line, a sign, symbol, design or a logo, the re-branding will help to identify and differentiate the corridor from all others in the city, and ultimately create a destination, rather than just a location.

### Create a Branded Website for the Corridor

As part of the re-branding effort, it is critical that the area have a designated (user-friendly) website that is a tool for the residents and businesses in the area. Similar to the Downtown Partnership website, we envision the website for South Academy to include a directory of all businesses, lists of resources for residents, such as the area's parks, community centers, a calendar of events to include farmers markets and community meetings, public safety information and other various tools and resources for businesses. This would also be a valuable place to outline and market the City's standard economic Vitality Accommodation Package.

Additionally, this would be an ideal place to list the various incentives and programs available from the City, County and CSU. Another opportunity to show that the City is a partner in the corridor.



### Work Diligently with Local Media to Highlight and Tell Better Stories of the Area

The City should highlight and run press releases on each and every positive project, story and accomplishment in the area. Changing perceptions starts with telling better stories.

# Additional Implementation Strategies

Capitalize and play on the wins that the area is already having, use what is happening currently in the area that is positive for momentum to accelerate community redevelopment and revitalization. Below is a summary from the Great Streets Plan annual update that highlights recent accomplishments in the corridor.

Additionally, it is important to leverage significant transportation fund already set aside and prioritized for this area to maximize positive community development impact.

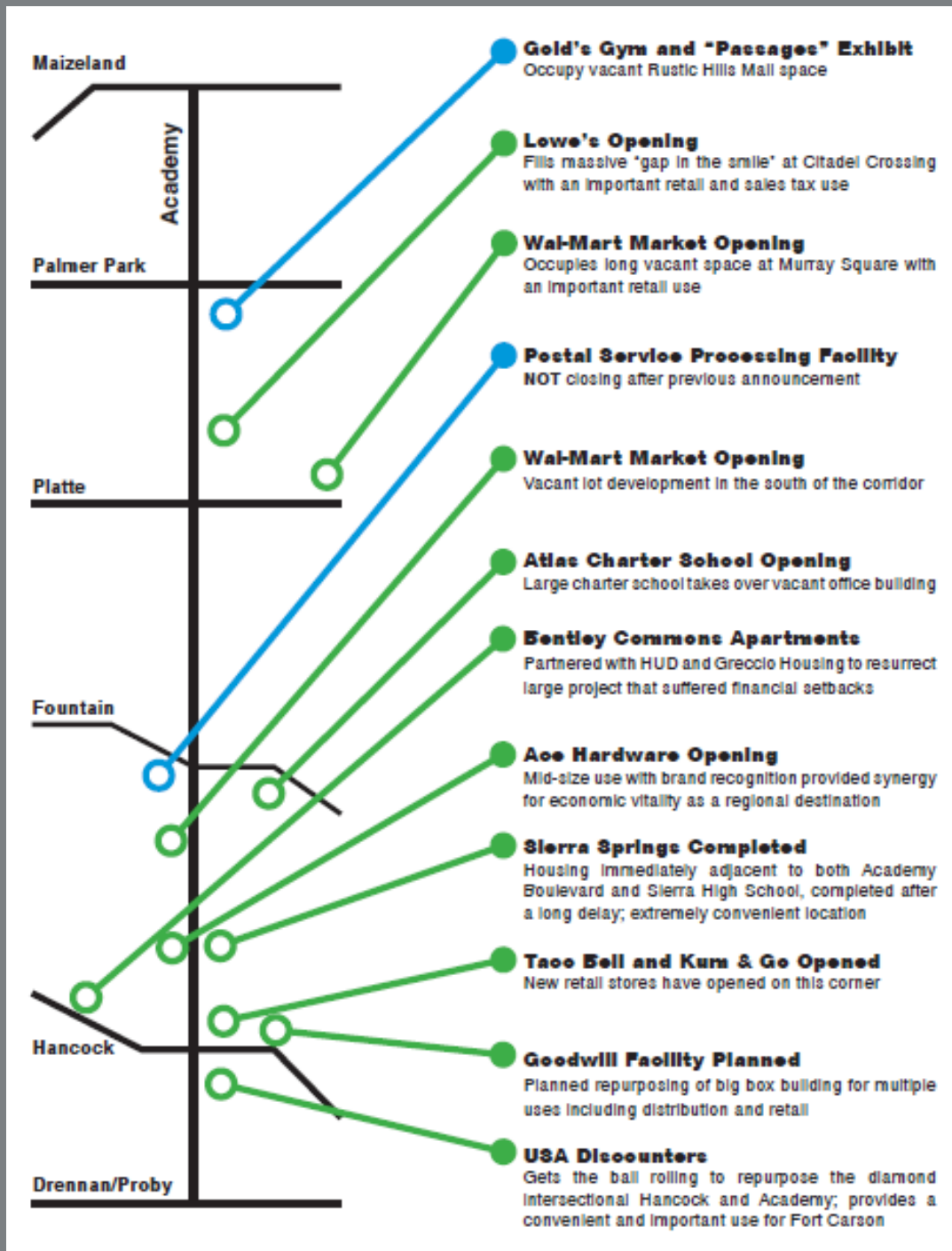


FIGURE 2



# Additional Tools and Resources to Explore

There is no single or perfect way to make all of the recommendations in this report come to life, there are however many resources and tools that can be utilized. With an overarching recommendation for the City to utilize the Grants Management Department to aggressively seek funding for South Academy projects, the following are programs and resources that should be researched and evaluated for applicability and feasibility in the corridor.

- **New Market Tax Credits**  
The New Markets Tax Credit Program was established by Congress in 2000 to spur new or increased investments into operating businesses and real estate projects located in low-income communities. The NMTC Program attracts investment capital to low-income communities by permitting individual and corporate investors to receive a tax credit against their Federal income tax return in exchange for making equity investments in specialized financial institutions called Community Development Entities (CDEs). This program is administered by the Treasury Department through the CDFI Community Development Financial Institutions Fund.
- **Choice Neighborhood Grants**  
The Choice Neighborhoods program supports locally driven strategies to address struggling neighborhoods with distressed public or HUD-assisted housing through a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation. Local leaders, residents, and stakeholders, such as public housing authorities, cities, schools, police, business owners, nonprofits, and private developers, come together to create and implement a plan that transforms distressed HUD housing and addresses the challenges in the surrounding neighborhood.
- **Tax Increment Financing**  
A designation of an Urban Renewal area allows for Increment Financing (TIF), which is a program that allocates future increases in property taxes (and sometimes sales tax) from a designated area to pay for improvements within that area.
- **Renewable Energy Credits and Energy Investments Credits**  
There is currently a number of programs that offer tax rebates and credits, for utilizing renewal energy sources. With the ample amount of large buildings in the corridor there is an opportunity for adding substantial rooftop solar panels that may result in additional incentives. The Colorado Clean Energy Fund – New Energy Economic Development (NEED) Program, are a few such programs.
- **Business Improvement Districts**  
A business improvement district (BID) is a private sector initiative to manage and improve the environment of a business district with services financed by a self-imposed and self-governed assessment. Similar to a common area maintenance (CAM) charge commonly found in shopping centers, a BID can help a business district increase its competitiveness in the regional marketplace. Services financed by a BID are intended to enhance, not replace, existing City services.

# Implementation Matrix

Action	Possible People and Agencies to be Involved	Possible Funding Sources	Timeframe
Bury overhead power and transmission lines- to begin with consideration of each Catalyst Area	Colorado Springs Utilities  City Grants Manager City Planning Public Works	CSU to pay for 50%  Obtain Grants to pay remainder – CDBG Funds, Safe Routes to School, etc.	Immediate- beginning with Hancock intersection as a pilot area Plans in place and funded for priority segments and intersections by end of 2015.
Designate additional Community Development Block Grant strategy area and prioritize CDBG funding for improvements.	City Community Development Block Grant Manager	HUD- CDBG	As soon as possible, next CDBG planning cycle.
Initiate and Expand Community Clean Up Programs	City – Parks Dept.  Council of Neighbors Organizations CONO  Local schools, churches, etc.	Keep America Beautiful Grants  HUD- CDBG	Immediate  Community clean up to occur semi-annually
Establish and Enforce Design Standards (Land Use & General)	City Planning, Stakeholders	CDBG for Code Enforcement	By 2015
Align and create a full movement signalized intersection at Portal Dr.	City Traffic Engineering	City Funded	By 2015
Relocate Primary Citadel Bus Transfer Station onto Academy Blvd.	City Transit Services  City Grants Manager	Grants- DOT, Safe Routes to School,	Within 5 Years – 2019 Goal
Support 2014 Hancock Intersection Interchange Improvements	City Planning  City Traffic Engineering	PPRTA, PPACG	Design and funding plan by end of 2015
Connect Surrounding Neighborhoods to the Corridor	City Planning  City Traffic Engineering	Grants- CDBG, Safe Routes to School,  PPRTA, PPACG	Ongoing – significant progress within 5 Years – 2019 Goal
Further Expansion of Enterprise Zone	El Paso County Economic Development	N/A	Begin process as soon as possible, goal to be classified as and Enterprise Zone- 2015
Develop a Policy to Defer Connection and Associated Utility Fees	Colorado Springs Utilities	N/A	Immediate ; options and action plans by end of 2014
Business Retention and Expansion Strategy Meetings	Mayor, City Council, Regional Business Alliance, Small Business Development Center	N/A at this time	One meeting to be held by end of 2014
Encourage and Incentivize a Pharmacy/ Grocer to be located in the Rustic Hills Neighborhood	Market Driven  Colorado Springs Utilities, City Economic Development	Private Investment  Colorado Fresh Food Financing Fund	Market Driven, general target of 2016
Research the possibility of an expansion or relocation of the City Senior Center	Colorado Springs Housing Authority  Outside Consultants	HUD, Other Grants Housing Authority Reserve	By 2015
Explore, Engage or Further Community Policing	CSPD, Pikes Peak Areas Crime Stoppers, Various	N/A at this time	Immediate

**FIGURE 2**

# Implementation Matrix

Action	Possible People and Agencies to be Involved	Possible Funding Sources	Timeframe
Explore Options to Increase Police Presence	Colorado Springs Police Department , City Grants Manager	Grants- CDBG for enhanced Code Enforcement	Immediate and ongoing
Work with Citadel Mall Management and Key Property Owners to Identify Key Issues	City Staff, Colorado Springs Police Department, Citadel Mall Management	N/A at this time	First meeting by July 2014, follow up actions as appropriate
Actively engage Colorado Springs Utilities' Meter Check	Colorado Springs Utilities	N/A	Immediate
Support Strategic Use of Tax Incentives	City Economic Vitality Office	Public-Private Partnerships	Immediate and opportunistic
Coordinate with local Housing Authorities and Housing Agencies to better market the available programs and resources	Colorado Springs Housing Authority, El Paso County Housing Authority, local housing agencies	N/A	Immediate
City/ County to explore the feasibility of either a satellite office for Citizens Services, the potential of mobile services, or other enhanced access programs	DHS, DMV, Clerk and Recorder, City Grant Manager	Grants, PPACG	Feasibility study to be completed by early 2015, possible execution within 2-3 years.
Focus efforts on developing and improving public spaces, parks, community centers, community gardens, etc.	Parks and Recreation Department, City Grants Manager, Local neighborhood members	Grants- Great Outdoors Colorado	Prioritize one project for each catalyst area by end of 2014, create a funding and execution plan by mid-2015
Encourage and support the development of farmers markets and various ethnic markets in the area	Local Farmers, Land Owners	N/A at this time	Ongoing
Promote Community Ownership in area Improvements	City Economic Development Office, Contractors, Community Organizations	N/A	Ongoing
Implement a Community Public Art Program	City Parks and Recreation, Local Art Galleries, Schools, Arts Council	Grants	As soon as possible, aim to have to installations by summer 2015
Develop a Branding Strategy for the Area	City Staff, Local Marketing Agency	NA at this time	Immediate
Create a Branded Website for the Corridor	City Staff, Local Marketing Agency	City Sponsored	Immediate and ongoing
Work Diligently with Local Media to Highlight and Tell Better Stories of the Area	Public Information / Communication Office, Local Media	N/A	Immediate and ongoing
Designate a City Project manager and establish oversight/ follow up/ accountability committee	Solutions Team, City Staff	N/A	Within next 6 months and annual update meeting and report

**FIGURE 2**

## Appendix A - Rustic Hills Catalyst Area Map



FIGURE 2

# Appendix B - Citadel Catalyst Area Map



FIGURE 2

## Appendix C - Fountain Catalyst Area Map



FIGURE 2

# Appendix D - Hancock Catalyst Area Map



FIGURE 2