

NORTH FLORES: STREET OF FLOWERS

A beautification project along the Old Spanish Trail in San Antonio

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July, 2005

Since Spring of 2004, Scenic San Antonio has been working with the City of San Antonio, Downtown Alliance, Five Points and Downtown Neighborhood Associations, Old Spanish Trail Centennial Association(OST100), Master Gardeners, Fox Tech HS and others on a beautification/economic development project along N. Flores from Houston St. on the south, to San Pedro Park on the north. This long neglected stretch is located in both the historic Camino Real and Old Spanish Trail roadways. It is also an official City bike route and has a pedestrian scale with historic buildings built up to the sidewalk.

Scenic San Antonio hosted three stakeholder public meetings and a design party or charrette to develop a consensus on a vision for the corridor. San Antonio Trees and Scenic San Antonio applied but was turned down for a Texas Forest Grant in 2004. Scenic S.A. raised funds from private donations through mail, phone and e-mail solicitations to supplement the trees and flowers donated by the City and VIA mass transit.

HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

Scenic San Antonio held numerous meetings to discuss possible areas in or near downtown that needed some TLC. Members were interested in a dramatic before and after project, similar to that which Scenic San Antonio and San Antonio Trees had completed over eleven years ago, along the Broadway Urban Corridor District. The numerous Bradford Pear and Redbud saplings have now matured and offer shade and beauty to that eclectic corridor.

City Planner, Carol Haywood, suggested we contact Charlotte Kahl about landscaping portions of the Old Spanish Trail. OST100 had already done impressive organizational and research work on the project. N. Flores offered an even more challenging opportunity for enhancements than did the Broadway project. The tie-in with historic El Camino Real de los Tejas and the Old Spanish Trail made the project even more attractive. OST100 made a persuasive presentation at a Scenic S.A meeting at the La Fonda on Main Restaurant and members voted to help with N. Flores.

After Scenic San Antonio held its first annual Scenic Awards reception, we began meeting in the Spring of 2004 on the N. Flores project. We started with a couple of meetings with City arborist, Debbie Reid, one of our Scenic Award recipients. She and her staff proved to be the most reliable and generous resource for the project. Debbie favored a mix of trees for the area and agreed to support us with volunteers, donated trees, mulch, tools, expertise and even water. She also coordinated her proposed planting locations with VIA Transit officials, to plant trees at most of the bus stops along N. Flores. The Downtown Business Alliance also agreed to help with the downtown section of N. Flores.

May 13, 2004: Scenic S. A. meeting at MADHATTERS Tea

This was the meeting, where, for the first time, both the 5 Points Neighborhood Association Board and a representative from the Downtown Alliance, participated in the discussion. To our surprise, both were interested in working together on the entire corridor, despite the demographic differences between the two areas, separated by a major highway. At that point, we thought we would work in two phases on the entire corridor. Phase 1 would include Downtown from I-35 on the north, to Houston St. on the south. The second phase would focus on the Five Points section, from I-H 35 north to San Pedro Park. A list of potential collaborators included: Los Amigos, the Downtown Residents Association, the local school district (SAISD), Pace Museum, Alamo Music, City of S.A., Bexar County Commissioners Court, S.A. Conservation Society, Master Gardeners, Camino Real Association, and City Public Service (CPS).

June 15th, 2004: 1st public stakeholders meeting at M. K. Davis Restaurant, in the Five Points Neighborhood on N. Flores:

The invitation to the meeting describing the gathering as "CREATING A VISION FOR THE NORTH FLORES CORRIDOR" was hand delivered to all residences and businesses along the corridor. The small back room of the restaurant enjoyed a huge standing room only turnout. Most of the participants were presenters, describing to neighbors what they could do to help. At the beginning of the meeting, our new one page N. Flores Beautification survey was passed out, to be

completed and returned at the end of the meeting. This survey was a wish list of enhancements that Scenic S. A., the Five Points Neighborhood representatives and OST had discusses and delicately worded to reflect stakeholder support for each of the outlined enhancements. The survey is printed at the end of this article.

The Scenic S.A. mission and brief history of the Broadway beautification project was presented. Everyone was concerned that there would not be enough time, within the promised one hour limit, to hear from the long list of presenters. Here is a summary of what we heard:

An assistant to Councilman Roger Flores relayed his support for Beautification of N. Flores.

Charlotte Kahl gave an overview of the Old Spanish Trail along N. Flores.

Marcie Ince talked about the Camino Real and the S.A. Conservation Society's support for the project.

Ben Brewer, Exec. Director of the Downtown Alliance discussed the Downtown Strategic Plan.

A Five Points Neighbor said that the beautification effort jibes with the neighborhood plan.

Sandy Justice, with the Master Gardeners, said they would help with landscaping and education.

Debbie Reid outlined what the City could do to help with landscaping.

Heather De Grella, Scenic S.A. member and architect, presented a "before and after" sketch of N. Flores with and without landscaping.

Jon Thompson, architect and activist, unveiled his PhotoShop illustration of a possible public art sculpture for the 5 Points traffic island.

Dana Nichols, SA Water Systems landscape designer, outlined SAWS programs.

Greg Baker, City Planning Department, discussed neighborhood action programs.

Nina Nixon Mendez, Senior planner, expanded on options for working with the City to revitalize the corridor.

Jimmy Le Flore, City Design Enhancement Office, listed the opportunities available for using public art to enhance and revitalize.

The surveys were handed in, and the meeting miraculously ended on time. Most left feeling that something might actually happen as a result of the meeting. However, on her way out of the door, one elderly Five Points neighbor whispered to me that nothing would ever get done in the neighborhood, and any landscaping would be immediately stolen along N. Flores.

At a follow-up meeting with OST100 and the Five Points Neighborhood Board, we looked at the attendance at the public meeting and results of the surveys from that meeting. We decided to form four subcommittees for the overall effort. They would be: historic designation, economic development, public art, and landscaping. The survey results were very positive, especially on the landscaping issue. The surveys, which included contact information on the participating stakeholder, helped us decide who to invite to join the various subcommittees.

At the first landscape subcommittee meeting, which included representatives from CPS and City Public Works, it became clear that the downtown section of N. Flores, mainly a commercial section, would actually be the more difficult phase, due to the lack of public right-of-way or green space in which to landscape near the street. Asphalt removal would be expensive and difficult, especially with narrow sidewalks and ADA handicap restrictions. Overhead utilities posed an additional challenge on both sides of the street.

We learned that funds were available through "Keep San Antonio Beautiful" to plant trees on residential private property if they would or shade or beautify the streetscape. Now it seemed that there was actually more opportunity to plant in the Five Points Neighborhood. When CPS and the City urged us to first pick the "low hanging fruit", it was clear that they were looking at the residential area as an easier target. Our next landscape committee meeting at Luby's cafeteria on Main Ave. was attended by Maria Leake, art teacher at Fox Tech High School, representatives with the Master Gardeners, Mark Peterson of the Texas Forest Service, and a representative of Keep San Antonio Beautiful. This meeting focused on an application to the Texas Forest Service to fund tree planting along the entire N. Flores corridor. We were starting to get a couple of donations by this time, mainly from downtown businesses who had attended our first meeting or received our sponsorship form. These donations would now be used as our "matching funds" needed to satisfy our Texas Forest Service application. We also had a commitment from Charles Bartlett, of Greenhaven Industries, for planting and funding of trees on the corridor. Eloy Rosales would write the application with help from OST100 and Scenic S.A.

July 1, 2004: With help of Greg Baker of City Planning Dept., the "Designation" subcommittee developed steps necessary for possible Historic, Conservation or Corridor Overlay Districts for N. Flores to present to overall N. Flores Beautification meeting and individual residents and businesses.

July 8: City Economic Development and Neighborhood Action Department staff outlined opportunities to the Economic Development subcommittee.

July 13th, 2nd public stakeholders meeting at ArtPace, 445 N. Flores:

A Report on the results of the Street of Flowers surveys was presented. Participants were told that the surveys were enthusiastic and indicated a strong desire for landscaping, especially trees and shrubs. Reports from the subcommittees were presented, and additional members were requested to volunteer for those committees. A new committee was suggested: fund raising. However, no volunteers were recorded for that committee. Then the meeting broke into subcommittee groups to strategize and set new meeting dates. An hour later, we reconvened to hear new meeting dates and other progress.

The landscaping committee reported it had already met three times and was focused on the first stage of landscaping aimed at a November planting. Committee members now included Sandy Justice and Lupe with Master Gardeners, James Koenig with CPS, Charles Bartlett of GreenHaven Industries, several Five Points Neighborhood members, Mark Peterson with the Alamo Forest Service, and Eloy Rosales with Public Works. It was reported that letters of support from Rep. Mike Villarreal and Councilman Flores were added to our grant application to the Texas Forest Service. Lisa Meyer with Keep S.A. Beautiful, was also writing a grant for the residential portions of N. Flores and she worked with Maria Leake on the same Texas Forest Service grant application. The grant application was targeting a fall planting of public spaces that can easily take trees. Those locations and the species appropriate for each location would all be identified in our grant application. James Koenig had identified the low hanging fruit, easiest planting areas and Eloy was adding to that map any locations where trees could thrive and not suffer from the abuse of buses and overhead wires, etc.

A second stage planting in early Spring as proposed for the more problematic sections where little or no green space exists and asphalt removal would be needed. We began looking at low trees, palms, ground cover and flowers for these areas.

Aug. 4, Emil Moncivais the Director of Planning, and Adrian Perez of Economic Development Department met the Economic Development and Designation Subcommittees and neighborhood business owners and residents. Economic and historic opportunities were discussed.

Aug 6, Small business packets, not picked up by businesses on Aug. 4th, were hand delivered to each N. Flores business. As part of the Designation committee task, an architect Conservation Society member drove N. Flores with OST100 identifying the significance of each individual building.

Aug. 10, Third public meeting, ArtPace, at 445 N. Main

The N. Flores Landscaping, Public Art, Designations, and Economic Development committees reported on their progress since the last meeting. The landscape committee requested comments after presenting a proposal and map in anticipation of November and Spring tree planting events. Following the committee reports, each committee met briefly to discuss future direction and next meeting dates.

At an unrelated meeting, Ben Brewer, of the Downtown Alliance, suggested that a charrette should be organized to get all the stakeholders along the N. Flores corridor on board and develop a cohesive vision for the streetscape. To that end, Scenic San Antonio began a search for a professional facilitator and landscape architects to organize and advise participants in a public meeting process. An excellent location was found for the charrette, or "design party", as we preferred to call it. Numerous meetings were held with the facilitator and landscape designers to prepare for the charrette. We also had to collect various maps of the area from the City and VIA and enlarge and reproduce the documents for the event. The San Antonio chapter of American Institute of Architects donated funds for printing expenses. After postponing the initial date of the charrette, we were finally ready to announce the event.

Sept. 25, 9 AM to 12 PM. N. Flores "design party" (charrette)

Positive Solutions Charter school, 1325 N. Flores.

6 landscape architects, architects and planners responded to the call to facilitate the event, lead by seasoned facilitator, Bob Ashcroft. All volunteered their time and expertise. Breakfast refreshments, compliments of the Five Points Neighborhood and the Downtown Residents Association, were served at the 3 hour long charrette. The walls were covered with resource maps, photos and drawings. Participants were grouped into 3 tables, each led by, at least, one facilitator. Each table was charged with designing a vision for the entire corridor and then a broad stroke landscape plan. Then, after listening to presentations and seeing the ideas and maps, posted on the wall, from the various groups, each group went back to the drawing board and designed a more focused landscape plan for the Five Points area alone. Some of these plans were still vague, while others were more specific. The main objective had been met, however. Experts and stakeholders had come together to develop a vision.

Charrette results: THE VISION:

TABLE 1:

1. Create a livable community celebrating past, present and future.
2. Create nodes of activity that are linked together along the corridor.
3. Preserve and enhance the historic, cultural environment

TABLE 2:

1. Create 2 distinct nodes.
2. Widen sidewalks and add bike lanes
3. Add lighting
4. Add traffic circle at 5 points intersection to reduce traffic
5. Improve drainage
6. Add public art
7. Revitalize San Pedro Creek and orient San Pedro Park to N. Flores.

TABLE 3:

1. Create a park-like setting at 5 Points intersection, which is pedestrian friendly with public art and bus stop improvements.
2. Need uniform, unique lighting
3. Widen the sidewalks and make them cohesive.
4. Add cohesive street furniture, trees and historic information to sidewalks.
5. Celebrate cultural landmarks

In preparation for the first phase tree planting event, we later walked the 5 Points stretch of N. Flores with a Master Gardener; Debbie Reid and Mark Bird, City Arborists; Dana Nichols, from SAWS; Dennis Fortassain, landscape architect; a CPS representative; Charles Bartlett, landscape specialist; and Marvin Hatter from the Texas Department of Transportation. All were very helpful in identifying the most specific types of landscapes for specific locations along the targeted stretch.

Nov. 6th: First N. Flores Tree Planting event

In preparation for the first planting, funding, landscaping and professional services were donated by: The City of San Antonio, VIA, Keep San Antonio Beautiful, Five Points Neighborhood Association, Texas Forest Service, SAWS, Master Gardeners, Gardening Volunteers of South Texas, Greenhaven Industries, Downtown Alliance, City Year Young Heroes, S.A. Parks and Recreation Dept., Salvation Army, Jefferson, Lee and International School of the Americas High Schools, Old Spanish Trail and Scenic S.A., Charles Bartlett, Glenn and Adelaide Winston, Naomi Nye, Dana Nichols, June Kachtik, Woody Halsey and Dennis Fortassain.

It was a perfect day for planting. An area underneath the busy IH-35 highway was the main staging area for the morning, with tables, manned by Five Points neighbors, set up to take names of volunteers, dispense gardening tools and breakfast tacos. Charlotte and Debbie organized groups to be educated by Master Gardeners in planting techniques, and immediately afterwards, to be sent off to various planting sites with appropriate tools and trees.

The first planting demonstration took place in front of the Salvation Army, where four trees were carefully placed and mulched by teams of City Year volunteers. VIA crews were also working the area, locating trees at bus stops. Mulch was gathered from the VIA bus station headquarters, where sacks were stacked on pallets waiting to be trucked to the various planting locations along N. Flores. Residents eagerly awaited the delivery of the free trees they had requested. Meanwhile, signs announcing parking, water, and rest room facilities dotted the corridor. The Salvation Army had set up a canteen in their parking lot, and were taking orders for coffee, tacos, sandwiches and muffins from hungry volunteers. TV crews filmed.

By the end of the morning, new trees were everywhere. Neighbors were out watering their new landscapes. One had to look hard to find the little saplings, each surrounded by a mulch donut. It was rewarding to see all the planning finally taking shape. There was excitement in the neighborhood. Something was happening after all! Next we held our breaths as we waited to see how long the trees would last. It rained off and on for the next week. The trees stayed, with the exception of a couple of VIA plantings at bus stops.

Nov. 19, Meeting with Downtown Alliance, 515 E. Houston St

This meeting focused on the phase two, downtown landscaping. OST100, Mark Peterson and representatives from the Downtown Alliance, Downtown Residents Association, Conservation Society, Los Amigos, and Master Gardeners agreed

on a target planting date of Feb. 5th , and April planting options. We identified possible resources for funding, in kind services and donated plant material.

We had learned that we had not received funding from the Texas Forest Service, so we would have to rely on trees donated by the City of San Antonio. We wanted to save funds from businesses and other sponsors to purchase palm trees for a phase three planting in the Spring. Although palm trees were very desirable for this Old Spanish Trail corridor and were identified in the charrette plans, the City Arborist would only donate canopy trees. We also knew that palms would be expensive and difficult to locate and plant. We were told that they could only be planted in the Spring, when the weather was warm.

The Downtown Alliance offered to take packets of information door to door to the various businesses along the downtown stretch of N. Flores. A deadline was set for when these forms had to be returned to us in preparation for the February planting. OST100 and Scenic San Antonio would develop the forms and the Downtown Alliance would print and collate the needed sets. We would ask CPS for some of their S.A. tree planting guides to include in the packet along with a sponsorship form, memorandum of understanding and a menu of trees and shrubs from which to choose.

We worked furiously on these packets and delivered the materials to the Downtown Alliance in two weeks, hoping the packets would get to the business owners before the holidays. Unfortunately, two months later, not a single form had been filled out and returned to us. Ben Brewer and his assistant made calls to the businesses with no results. It turned out that a personal visit or two from one of us, with additional forms in hand, was needed to get the materials we needed to organize the February 5th planting date, which was fast approaching.

Two weeks from the planting date, we had decided to postpone the planting. After I had made plans to travel to Mexico on that date, OST100, the arborists and neighborhood associations decided to proceed with the planting after all. I understand that the Feb. 5th planting turned out to be a very successful effort. The City donated all the trees for this planting. KB Home (TLC) volunteers showed up with their own tools. They and other volunteers finished the planting in no time.

We decided to create a large map of the entire N. Flores corridor. We added color coded dots to the planting sites, showing which were proposed, which had been planted and which were palms and flowers. This map would be a helpful visual at meetings, and was a tracking tool for progress made and work left to be done. Unfortunately, we could not find a venue to display the map on a temporary basis. Apparently, it was just too large.

April 2nd, 2005: Tree Planting.

This planting event focused primarily on the fourteen Washingtonian palm trees purchased and transported by Charles Bartlett on a flat bed to the N. Flores sites. The City was also planting some canopy trees along the corridor, with an experiment in asphalt removal at one of the planting sites. Lantanas, petunias and bogavillas were added to beds and medians. More memorandums of understanding (MOU's) had been individually collected from residents and businesses receiving the trees. Again, KB Home volunteers joined others in an early morning planting event which targeted the entire corridor. The Salvation Army received much attention, and their canteen again proved very popular with hungry volunteers. Although the palms were not large, they were a handful for the volunteers.

A couple of weeks later, Maria Leake unveiled her student's mosaic murals and extensive landscaping on Fox Tech High School property on N. Flores. The large mosaics discuss and map the Camino Real and Old Spanish Trail in colorful ceramic pieces, surrounded by a lush garden. The chain link fences now feature confederate jasmine vines. Palm trees accent the canopy trees and shrubs. This project is so successful, I would call it the focal point of the corridor, and the first attempt to incorporate public art into the landscape. Maria's article can be found also in this ARTICLES section of www.OLDSPANISHTRAILCENTENNIAL.com.

In spite of the summer drought, it seems that all but two or three of about 150 trees planted since November, 2004, are thriving as of mid-July, 2005. We now look forward to the fall of 2005, when we plan to remove more asphalt and plant more canopy trees at the Roy Akers Funeral Home. We also hope that S. X. Callahan will complete his roof top garden and irrigation system above his auto repair shop, down the block from the funeral home. We will all enjoy watching our seedlings flourish in time. And we hope the Street of Flowers will once again thrive with beauty and prosperity.

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"THE STREET OF FLOWERS" SURVEY
NORTH FLORES BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT
(from Houston St, on the south, to San Pedro Park on the north)

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE NORTH FLORES CORRIDOR? GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK.

Please circle your preferences and rank (prioritize) the issues by assigning a number to each. Please return this form to Scenic S.A.

1. Would you be interested in learning more about economic development along N. Flores? Yes No
2. Do you want N. Flores to be formally designated part of the historic Camino Real? Yes No
3. We are proposing the planting of a variety of drought tolerant landscaping on public and private land, hopefully by fall, 2004. Would you like to see more landscaping? Yes No
4. Would you help plant and maintain landscaping if it were located near your property? Yes No
5. If you own property along N. Flores St., would you be willing to plant more trees and other landscaping on your own property? Yes No
6. If yes, please write the address of your property and circle what you would like to plant.
Address:

Please circle: trees shrubs trellises flower beds plant containers ground cover vines
7. Would you be willing to donate landscaping or help fund raise for this project? Yes No
8. Would you like to see more public art, attractive street furniture and signage on N. Flores? Yes No
9. Would you prefer VIA bus shelters and benches that are unique to N. Flores rather than the generic shelters with advertising that VIA is now installing throughout the City? Yes No
10. Would you be interested in learning more about designating N. Flores St. as an historic or conservation district in order to preserve its architecture and character? Yes No
11. Would you be interested in learning more about designating N. Flores St. as an urban corridor district in order to address visual clutter? Yes No
12. Would you be willing to help organize the merchants on the corridor? Yes No
13. Other comments or ideas? Please use the back of this page for additional comments.

Optional information:

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Name _____ Address _____

Phone/Fax _____ E-mail address _____

Tree Care Agreement Form

(Memoranda of Understanding)

Thank You for participating in the "Beautification of N. Flores" tree planting program.

Scenic San Antonio & the City of San Antonio, are offering you one or more free trees to plant as part of a tree planting and preservation program. When you plant a tree, you are:

- Conserving energy for tomorrow!
- Cleaning our air!
- Reducing storm-water runoff!
- Reducing cooling costs!
- Providing habitat, food, and shelter for our native birds & wildlife!
- Adding value to your property!
- Cooling our community!

In exchange for your free tree(s) you must agree to care for the trees which will require watering for a minimum of two years. Please read and mark the checklist of tree care guidelines and complete the bottom portion.

Caring Guidelines Checklist:

(I agree to the following checked guidelines)

- Planting of my tree(s) following proper planting techniques.
- Have a hole at least 2 X the diameter of the rootball, preferably larger.
- Keep the top of the rootball level with surrounding grade.
- Never put soil on top of the rootball - only around it.
- Water the rootball and have hole backfilled completely.
- Remove all nursery ties, flagging, wire, rope, and tags.
- Apply 7 - 9 gallons of water over the entire planting zone whenever the soil is dry.
- Protect the trunks of the young trees from weed eaters and lawn mowers.
- Maintain a layer of organic mulch 2 - 3 inches deep and 2 to 3 feet radius around the tree. Have the mulch placed several inches AWAY from the tree trunk.
- Keep tree wells free of weeds and grass.
- Fertilize with a slow release fertilizer annually, preferably in the Fall.

(Please print clearly)

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Signature _____ Date _____ Email Address _____

For additional questions. Please contact: Kathleen Trenchard, (210) 225-6009, kt@cut-it-out.org