

426.7 South 12th Avenue Cultural & Culinary Corridor

Location: Project area is within a two mile corridor on South 12th Avenue, from Ajo to Drexel.

Scope: This is an economic development project to invest in signage, landscape, and pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements along one of Pima County's most culturally unique and vibrant, but underserved commercial corridors. Specifically, the project will include signage designating the commercial district along the corridor, sidewalks, pedestrian median refuge islands, landscaping, nodes of shade and seating, lighting improvements, and repaving of the roadway to add bike lanes.

Benefits: The South 12th Avenue Cultural and Culinary Corridor project will improve safety, walkability, and aesthetics in a commercial district that celebrates the region's distinctive Mexican American heritage. The improvements will spur further private investment in this commercial corridor; increase cultural and culinary tourism; and improve conditions for the tens of thousands of pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and motorists who use the corridor every day.

The project will provide public investment in a portion of South 12th Avenue that is a distinctive hub of Pima County's Latino culture and a popular regional culinary destination. The corridor is lined with shops that have traditionally been owned by and cater to generations of Mexican American and native families. South 12th Avenue is home to some of Tucson's most celebrated and successful Mexican restaurants, is a key segment of Visit Tucson's "Best 23 Miles of Mexican Food," and is the focus of regular "Best of the Barrio" food tours. It lies on the region's second most heavily used transit route; hosts Tucson's two major private bus lines providing service to Mexico; and is heavily used by automobiles, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

While Pima County's \$9 million 12th Avenue Community Revitalization Project (1997 Highway User Revenue Fund bonds) provided improvements outside of the project area, these improvements did not address the commercial core of the corridor. Most of this core area is not served by sidewalks or safe pedestrian crossings, and is devoid of shade or landscape improvements. It has been the site of 27 auto accidents involving bicyclists and pedestrians in the past four years, including three fatalities; much higher rates than those found in the City overall. Local business leaders in the project vicinity have been seeking improvements for over two decades. In 2013, a new business association, the South Side Business Coalition (SSBC), was formed to champion investment in the corridor to support and encourage business development. The SSBC has sponsored lending and credit support classes at the Microbusiness Advancement Center and the University of Arizona, and local graffiti cleanups. The SSBC has been collaborating with City staff on grant applications and efforts to seek out support for strategic investments in infrastructure in the corridor's commercial core. Local schools and neighborhood associations have joined business leaders in advocating for improvements and participating in various planning initiatives over the years.

In September 2014, the City conducted two public meetings on the proposed project. Property owners, businesses, and representatives from neighborhoods along the project corridor were notified by postcard and by phone. The purpose of the meetings was to update the public on the proposed bond-funded 12th Avenue improvement project, to answer questions, and to receive stakeholders' comments and suggestions. A total of 31 people signed in at the two meetings, the majority of which were business and/or property owners in the project area.

Participants indicated great support for improvements on South 12th Avenue. Their comments (verbal and written) addressed the importance of making the corridor safer for pedestrians; the

benefit to businesses of making the corridor more attractive; for the benefit of better lighting to help combat crime; and the desire to carefully consider the design of public art in the project given the area's graffiti problems. These comments will all help guide the ultimate design of the project.

To create a detailed plan of improvements, the City of Tucson will lead a thorough corridor planning process with business and property owners, neighborhood residents, and other regional stakeholders. The City has successfully conducted planning and implementation of similar projects in constrained commercial corridors including Campbell Avenue, Stone Avenue, and Grande Avenue.

Total Cost Estimate: \$3,581,000

Bond Funding Estimate: \$3,175,000

Other Funding Estimate: \$406,000 committed to the project, to include: \$100,000 from the City of Tucson for the Corridor Planning process, \$200,000 from City of Tucson secured federal funds for a HAWK pedestrian crossing, \$71,000 from City of Tucson secured Tohono O'Odham 12% grant funding for bus shelters and pads, landscaping and public art at north and south end of project area; and \$35,000 from the City of Tucson for landscaping at north and south end of corridor. In addition, the City will continue to pursue funding opportunities such as the federal Transportation Alternatives Program and historic sign preservation monies.

Total Cost Estimate by Major Task (bond funds only): Design \$300,000, Construction \$2,875,000

Implementation Periods: 4, 5

Project Schedule by Major Task: Planning at 12 months, design at 9 months, construction at 9 months.

Project Manager: City of Tucson (Project requested by City of Tucson)

Operator: City of Tucson

Future Operating and Maintenance Costs: Estimated annual maintenance cost of \$50,000.

Regional Benefits: Businesses, governments, and community leaders across Pima County increasingly trade on the region's cultural and economic ties with Mexico as a source of tourism, visitor spending, and economic development. South 12th Avenue, which is the terminus of the region's two major Mexican bus lines, is not only the gateway by which many Mexican visitors enter the region, but also a popular alternate route to Interstate 19 for commuters traveling to downtown Tucson. The corridor itself, now a nationally recognized culinary destination, has served as an incubator for successful businesses that now operate branches throughout the region. With targeted investment and continued business and public engagement, the corridor has the potential to become a culturally relevant public space and tourist destination comparable to that of Olvera Street in L.A. or the Mission District in San Francisco. Investing in the condition and character of the South 12th Avenue Cultural and Culinary Corridor will promote tourism, support the development of local and regional businesses, improve safety and connectivity on a regionally significant transportation route, and complete the investments begun by Pima County in 1997.