



ELENA GALLEGOS OPEN SPACE
**EDUCATION CENTER
FEASIBILITY STUDY**

FINAL DRAFT | JANUARY 2022

DEKKER
PERICH
SABATINI



[THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	3	6. PRECEDENT PROJECTS	16
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4	Open Space Visitor Center (Coors Blvd).....	17
Purpose	4	Valle de Oro Visitor Center.....	18
Findings and Recommendations	5	Bachechi Open Space - Bachechi Environmental Education Building.....	19
Conclusion	5	Rio Grande Nature Center State Park	20
2. INTRODUCTION.....	8	7. COMPARATIVE SITE ANALYSIS	22
Purpose	8	Evaluation Criteria	22
Scope.....	8	Site Analysis.....	24
3. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK	10	Recommendation.....	38
Albuquerque & Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan (2017)	10	8. ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS	40
Open Space Master Plan (1999)	10	Road Analysis	40
Sandia Foothills Area Plan - Rank 2 (1983)	10	9. SITE/BUILDING PROGRAMMING.....	40
Sandia Mountain Wilderness Area.....	10	Program and Adjacency Diagram	40
4. EXISTING CONDITIONS	12	Preliminary Floorplan and Conceptual Rendering. 42	
Overall Physical Site Conditions.....	12	10. CONCLUSION	46
Visitor Usage	13		
Anticipated Site Improvements.....	14		
5. PUBLIC OUTREACH.....	15		

[THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY]

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CABQ Parks and Recreation Dept.

David Simon, Director

CABQ Open Space Division

Colleen Langan-McRoberts, Superintendent

Jim Sattler, Assistant Superintendent

Tricia Keffer, Planner

Dekker/Perich/Sabatini

Will Gleason, AICP, LEED AP, Principal-in-Charge

Ken Romig, ASLA, SITES AP, Landscape Architect

Kate Maliskas, AICP, Urban Planner

Rebekah Longstreet, Urban Planner

Courtney Mowrer, Intern Interior Designer

NV5, Inc.

Joanne Eakin, Cultural Resources Principal Investigator

Advisory Committee Members

John Goodwin, Open Space Alliance

Don Meaders, Open Space Advisory Board of Directors

Richard and Colleen Shackley, Open Space TrailWatch

Rachel Swanteson-Franz, The Wilderness Society

Aziza Chavez, Office of Councilor Trudy Jones

Art Gardenswartz, High Desert HOA

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

Located just beyond the northeastern extent of the City of Albuquerque municipal boundary in the Foothills, Elena Gallegos Open Space is a 640-acre area surrounded by Cibola National Forest with the Sandia Wilderness bordering to the east. It is part of the larger Major Public Open Space system around the Albuquerque metro area that is managed by the City of Albuquerque and provides recreational and educational opportunities for residents and visitors.

Within the last decade, visitor counts have increased as the community takes advantage of the outdoor amenities, including picnic areas and sponsored educational events as well as hiking, biking, and equestrian trails within Elena Gallegos Open Space. Between 2009 and 2019, visitor counts at Elena Gallegos have increased by approximately 9.5 percent. With this increased traffic and interest in outdoor spaces, the City is considering additional ways to enrich the open space experience and create educational opportunities for the public that capitalize on the abundant cultural and natural resources of the Foothills area.

The City's Open Space Visitor Center on the west side of the Rio Grande is a popular destination, attracting thousands of visitors per year with events and educational opportunities. The City



View from a parking area towards Sandia Crest

would like to create a comparable facility on the east side of Albuquerque, to both celebrate the open space assets in the Foothills and create a venue that can be used for educational and community events. The proposed facility will provide a welcoming experience that embodies and showcases Albuquerque's unique cultural and natural landscape and offers extensive views of the surrounding valley and mountains.

This feasibility study assesses existing conditions, highlights precedent visitor center projects in the region, evaluates six sites for suitability, analyzes affected views and road conditions, and provides a conceptual site and building program. It also highlights needed site improvements that the Open Space Division is anticipating in the short-term.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative site analysis evaluated six sites within and near the Elena Gallegos Open Space. Using a scoring matrix to rate the six sites according to seven criteria including vehicular access, impacts on immediate site and adjacent area, circulation and parking, infrastructure connections, viewsheds, neighborhood impact, and site suitability, it is determined that two sites, Site 1B and Site 3, are the best options. Site 1B, located north of the park attendant booth at the terminus of the North Spur Rd and adjacent to Cottonwood Springs Trailhead, offers an excellent location that does not add to the congestion of the Loop Rd and has excellent views of the surrounding landscapes. It is also close to existing infrastructure connections and popular trailheads. Improvements to the North Spur Rd and additional parking and circulation must be included in site development. Site 3, located within the Loop

Rd at the northeastern extent, offers good vehicular access, circulation, and parking with few impacts on the immediate site and adjacent areas. Site 3 is also located in close proximity to trailheads and other existing amenities and has a relatively low impact on neighboring residences.

Public comment and Advisory Committee feedback indicated that parking is already very tight along the Loop Rd. While evaluating a site for the education center, called Site 6, located at the northeast corner of Tramway Blvd and Simms Park Rd, it was determined that this site is best suited for a satellite parking lot to provide additional parking for the Open Space, as its location along Simms Park Rd outside of the Open Space will not add to the congestion.

An approximately 6,000 to 8,000 square foot facility is recommended to provide a lobby, classroom space, interpretive room and coffee bar, staff offices and meeting room, restrooms, and storage. These interior spaces are open to a large viewing deck to capitalize on the stunning views. This facility is anticipated to be designed with consideration for green building standards.

CONCLUSION

The Elena Gallegos Open Space, with its established regional draw of regular users and visitors, provides an excellent location for an education center on the east side of Albuquerque that showcases the stunning views as well as the natural and cultural resources of the area. An education center would also help increase awareness of recreational opportunities available at Open Space and can also serve to increase accessibility for residents from different parts of the City.



**EXHIBIT A: SITE ANALYSIS
CONTEXT MAP**

The Site Analysis Context Map shows the six sites identified by the project team for further study into the feasibility of locating an education center in Elena Gallegos Open Space, located along the North Spur Rd and the Loop Rd within the Open Space, and Site 6, located outside of the boundaries.

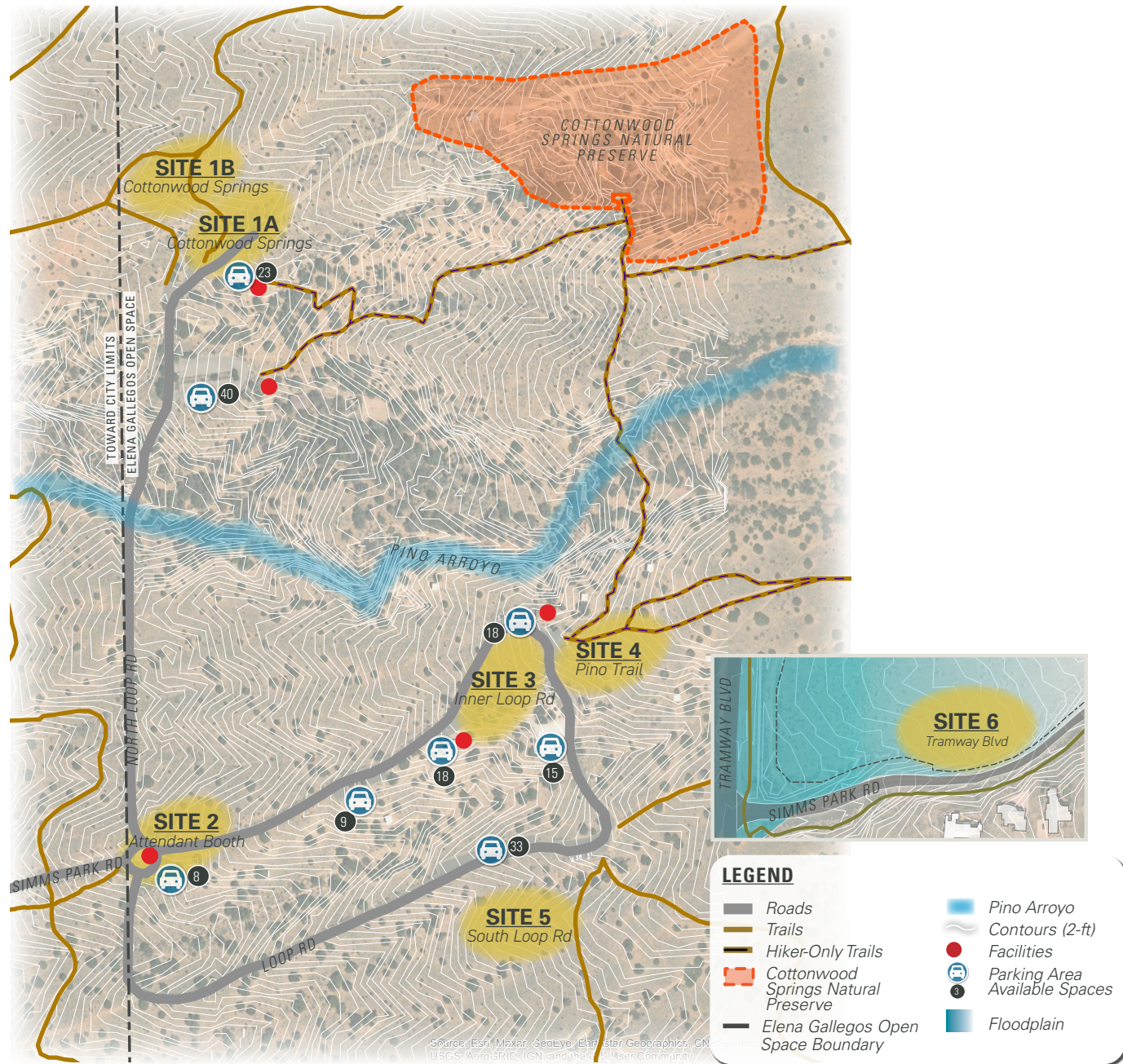


EXHIBIT B: SITE ANALYSIS SCORING MATRIX

The Site Analysis Scoring Matrix shows the scores given to the six sites identified by the project team according to the different scoring criteria. Site 1B and Site 3 have the highest scores, making either of these sites the best location for an education center.

SITE ANALYSIS SCORING MATRIX							
Criteria	Site 1A	Site 1B	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6
Vehicular Access	2	1	2	3	2	2	3
Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Land	2	3	2	2	1	2	1
Circulation and Parking	2	2	1	2	2	2	3
Infrastructure Connections	3	3	3	2	3	1	3
Viewsheds	1	3	3	2	2	3	1
Neighborhood Impact	3	3	1	3	3	2	1
Site Suitability	2	2	2	3	3	2	1
TOTAL	15	17	14	17	16	14	13

2. INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

Located just beyond the northeastern extent of the City of Albuquerque municipal boundary in the Foothills, Elena Gallegos Open Space is a 640-acre area surrounded by Cibola National Forest with the Sandia Wilderness bordering to the east. It is part of the larger Major Public Open Space system around the Albuquerque metro area that is managed by the City of Albuquerque and provides recreational and educational opportunities for residents and visitors, shown in ["Figure 1. Context Map" on page 9.](#)

Within the last decade, visitor counts have increased as the community takes advantage of the outdoor amenities, including picnic areas and sponsored educational events as well as hiking, biking, and equestrian trails within Elena Gallegos Open Space. Between 2009 and 2019, visitor counts at Elena Gallegos have increased by approximately 9.5 percent, shown in ["Table 1. Visitor Statistics" on page 14.](#) In 2020, visitor counts increased by 49 percent from 2019. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, people sought out outdoor activities as a way to recreate while keeping a safe social distance. With this increased traffic and interest in outdoor spaces, the City is considering additional ways to enrich the open space experience and create educational opportunities for the public that capitalize on the abundant cultural and natural resources of the Foothills area.

The City's Open Space Visitor Center on the west side of the Rio Grande is a popular destination, attracting thousands of visitors per year with events and educational opportunities. The City would like to create a comparable facility on the east side of Albuquerque, to both celebrate the open space assets in the Foothills and create a venue that can be used for educational and community events. The proposed facility will provide a welcoming experience that embodies and showcases Albuquerque's unique cultural and natural landscape and offers extensive views of the surrounding valley and mountains.

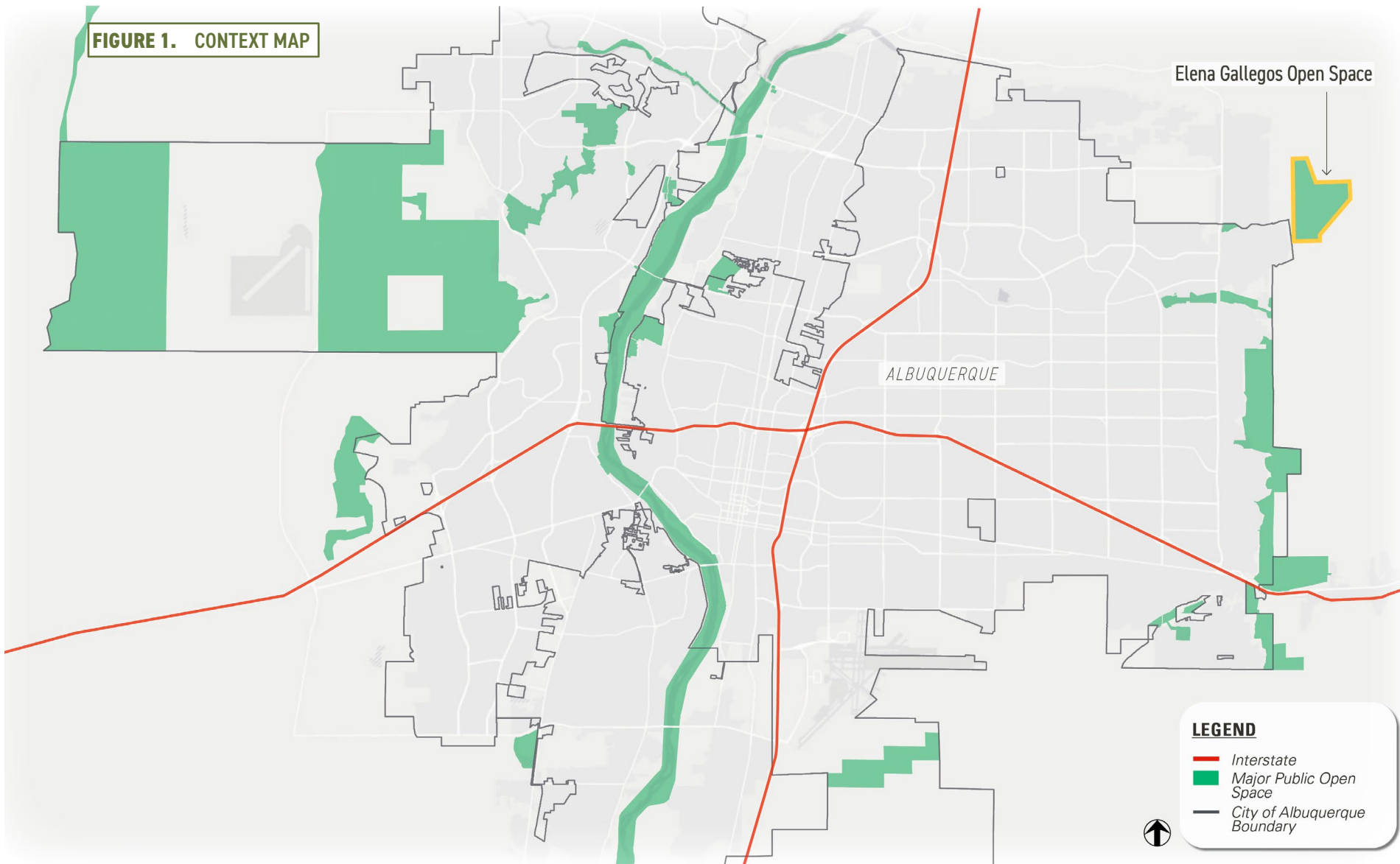
SCOPE

This feasibility study assesses existing conditions, highlights precedent visitor center projects in the region, evaluates six sites for suitability, analyzes affected views and road conditions, and provides a conceptual site and building program. It also highlights needed site improvements that the Open Space Division is anticipating in the short-term.



Elena Gallegos Open Space Amphitheater

FIGURE 1. CONTEXT MAP



Elena Gallegos Open Space

ALBUQUERQUE

LEGEND

- Interstate
- Major Public Open Space
- City of Albuquerque Boundary



3. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The following section is a review of the regulatory framework that pertains to Albuquerque, public open space, and the surrounding public land and speaks to long-range plans for this specific area. The existing planning documents help in understanding the goals and policies that shape the area. Since Sandia Mountain Wilderness Area surrounds Elena Gallegos Open Space, a short description of this designation is also included.

ALBUQUERQUE & BERNALILLO COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2017)

The Albuquerque & Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan sets forth a vision for the area in regards to growth and development. The Plan is comprehensive in nature, including everything from land use to resilience and sustainability. It organizes land into centers and corridors as well as areas of consistency and areas of change. In this way, Albuquerque and Bernalillo County can encourage and direct growth to specific areas by a holistic approach.

The Albuquerque & Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan contains a chapter dedicated to Parks & Open Space in which the Guiding Principles are applied to parks and Open Space goals, policies, and actions. One of these Guiding Principles, Equity,

indicates firstly that the Open Space network provides recreational and educational opportunities for everyone and secondly that park facilities integrate universal design to improve access for people of all abilities.

OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN (1999)

The Open Space Master Plan was written to establish guidelines for implementation of the MPOS (Major Public Open Space) Network goals contained in the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan (1975, 1988). This is a Rank II Facility Plan that establishes policy for planning, land use decisions, and management for the acquisition of the MPOS Network.

Section Three, Sandia Foothills includes what is today the Elena Gallegos Open Space, then called the Elena Gallegos Picnic Area. The area "provides a high level of exposure for the MPOS Network and a prime opportunity for public environmental education" (Open Space Master Plan, 1999). Goals listed in this document for the Sandia Foothills include:

- > *Conserve natural resources and environmental features including wildlife habitat, and the mix and diversity of ecotones;*
- > *Provide opportunities for outdoor education and recreation including trails for a variety of users: picnicking and environmental education*

- > *Shape urban form by providing an eastern edge to development and by providing a skyline free of development*
- > *Provide trail corridors including access to Federally held lands and a continuous north-south route along the base of the Sandias;*
- > *Manage lands to minimize risk to the public from natural hazards such as flash floods and unstable soils.*

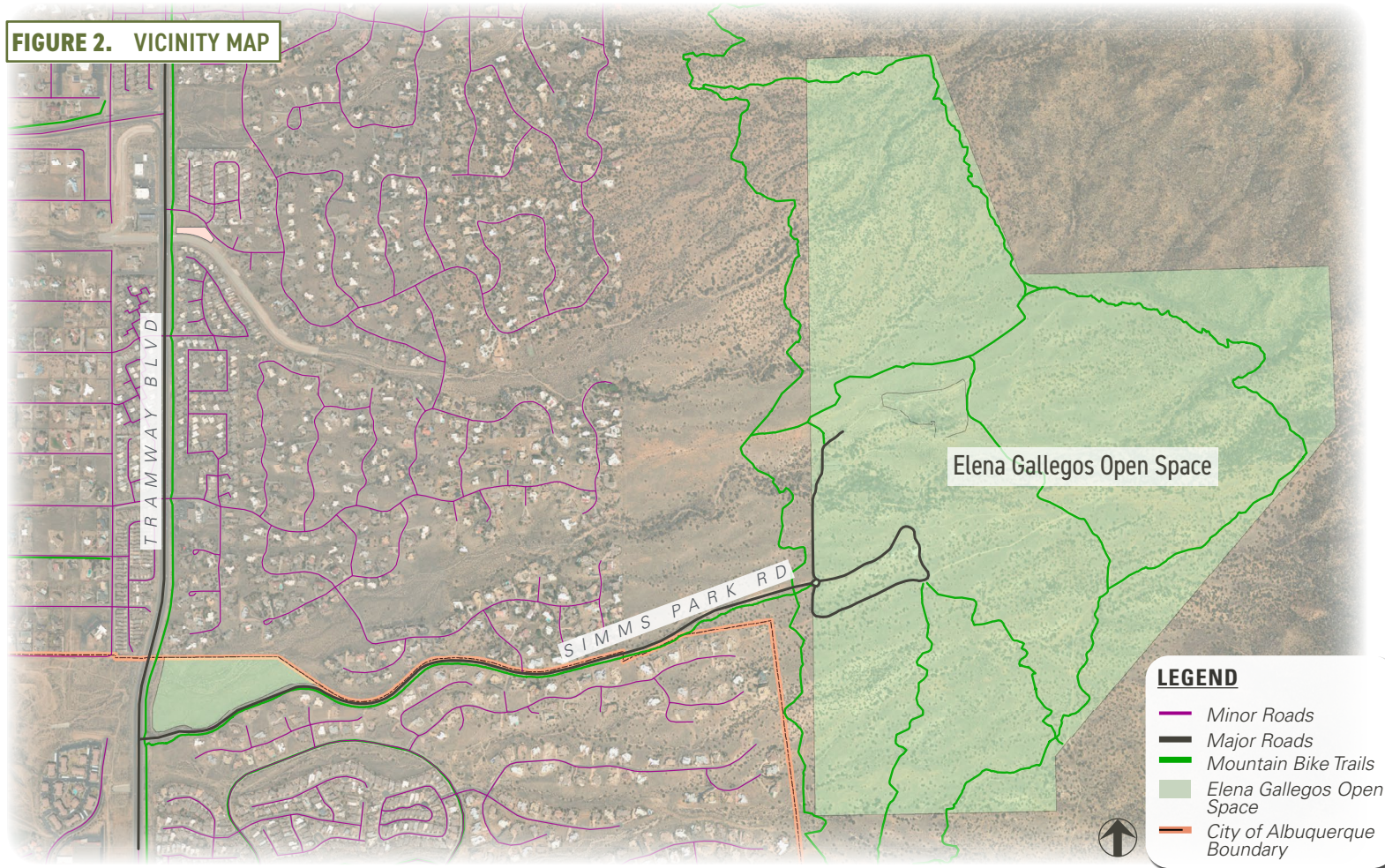
SANDIA FOOTHILLS AREA PLAN - RANK 2 (1983)

The Sandia Foothills Area Plan - Rank 2 (1983) contains specific development guidelines for the Plan's geographic extent to protect the area from unwise development and conserve the special topographic characteristics of the foothills. The document includes development guidelines such as street design, flood protection, height restrictions, and density limits. This Rank 2 Plan was replaced most recently by the updated City of Albuquerque IDO and is no longer in effect.

SANDIA MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS AREA

Sandia Mountain Wilderness Area, which surrounds the Elena Gallegos Open Space, was designated as a Wilderness Area in 1978. The Wilderness Act, passed in 1964, permanently protects some of the most natural and undisturbed places in America. Wilderness Areas do not allow any mechanized vehicles, which includes bicycles and strollers. The Sandia Mountain Wilderness Area is within the

Cibola National Forest and managed by the Forest Service. It has an extensive network of trails totaling nearly 120 miles and is very popular with local hikers. Many of these trails have connections to trailheads in the Elena Gallegos Open Space.



4. EXISTING CONDITIONS

OVERALL PHYSICAL SITE CONDITIONS

Elena Gallegos Open Space encompasses a total of 640 acres in the Foothills region of the Albuquerque metro area and is mainly used by the public for the extensive network of hiking and mountain biking trails. The landscape consists of juniper and pinon pine with cholla and prickly pear cactus, as well as native grasses. A paved Loop Road provides access to visitor facilities such as parking, restrooms, picnic areas, reservation areas, and trailheads. Trails are designated with signage; however, some informal trails exist that cut through the landscape in various locations.

Access and Circulation

Simms Park Rd provides access to the Open Space from Tramway Blvd. Traveling east on Simms Park Rd, the Open Space is situated about one and a half miles at the end of this road as it passes by the High Desert neighborhoods.

A park attendant booth is situated to take fees from visitors at the entry to Elena Gallegos Open Space. The road continues into the Open Space as a one-way loop, called Loop Rd. It circles around to a parking lot, trailheads, restroom facilities, and

other amenities. The Loop Rd terminates at the park attendant booth before it exits the Open Space boundary at Simms Park Rd. There is also a North Spur Rd that starts at the park attendant booth and extends northward towards the Cottonwood Springs area and Kiwanis Park Reservation Area. Although narrow, this road is two-way and dead ends at the Cottonwoods Springs parking area. Parking is provided along the Loop Rd and the North Spur Rd for easy access to the Open Space trailheads.

Public transit does not access the area. The City bus transit service stops at Tramway Blvd and Academy Rd. This bus stop is located one-quarter mile from the intersection of Simms Park Rd and Tramway Blvd and almost two miles from the park attendant booth at the entry to the Open Space.

Non-motorized transportation such as pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians can access the site from various trails from north-south and east directions as well as to the west via an unpaved path along the south side of Simms Park Rd that connects to the multi-use trail along Tramway Blvd.

Cultural and Natural Resources

Major Public Open Space areas often include sites with culturally significant and environmentally sensitive areas. It is important to acknowledge and protect those resources.

NV5 conducted a cultural resources record search and literature review for the 175 acres at Elena Gallegos. One archaeological site was found



The Loop Rd leading to a parking area next to the Pino Trailhead



The Loop Rd leading west to the park attendant booth



View towards the south looking over the Cottonwood Springs parking lot



A sign at a trailhead near Cottonwood Springs parking lot

near the Cottonwood Springs area that included prehistoric artifact scatter. This site has not been evaluated by the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) and the condition of the site is currently unknown.

Within the Elena Gallegos Open Space boundaries, an area identified as the Cottonwood Springs Natural Preserve is closed to the public. This area consists of a natural spring that hosts migratory bird populations as well as other wildlife year-round. This area is considered environmentally sensitive because of the natural spring and wildlife populations.

There is one major arroyo that flows through this area, the Pino Arroyo, that drains into a retention area located west of Tramway Blvd before flowing downhill through neighborhood development to meet the North Diversion Channel. Other minor arroyos flow east-west through the area. There is a small segment of the floodplain at the eastern boundary of the Open Space, as Pino Arroyo meets the North Spur Road.

Infrastructure Connections

Existing access to infrastructure, including electric and water, is provided to some areas of the Open Space. Electricity is supplied by PNM to the stables to the northeast of the Cottonwood Springs area, the Kiwanis Reservation Area, Double Shelter, the park attendant booth, and the toilets near the Pino Trailhead. A transformer is located just outside of the Elena Gallegos Open Space boundaries

approximately 175 feet northwest of the park attendant booth. Water is provided by a pump house near the stables that has three known lines. One line runs along the North Spur Rd to the park attendant booth. A second line runs south to the Kiwanis Reservation Area, with two other hose bibs along this line. A third line that is seasonal runs south to a drinking water fountain near the Pino Trailhead.

The toilet facilities in Elena Gallegos are all vault toilets that are regularly pumped. There are also two septic leach fields – one is located south of the Kiwanis Reservation Area while the second is located within the Loop Rd, southeast of the park attendant booth.

VISITOR USAGE

Existing Programming

In addition to hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian trails, visitors can use seven covered picnic tables and two reservations areas with barbecue grills for large gatherings. In the Cottonwood Springs area to the north of the Loop Road, the ADA accessible Cottonwood Springs Trail offers shaded rest stops and original artwork leading to a pond with a wildlife viewing blind. The Open Space often hosts school field trips as well as family-oriented activities led by Open Space Division staff and volunteers. A popular event in the programming schedule is the Summer Series that features live music performances and nature talks at the amphitheater.

Visitor Statistics

Visitor numbers have soared in recent years as hiking and other outdoor recreation has become more popular. Elena Gallegos Open Space offers excellent recreational opportunities and views across the city while still in close proximity to Albuquerque. Local visitor trends have reflected a national trend that has also seen a significant increase in those seeking outdoor opportunities close to urban centers. This was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a massive uptick in outdoor participation in 2020, as those in urban centers sought safe ways to pass free time outside of the home. The Outdoor Industry Association reported that 53 percent of Americans 6 and older participated in outdoor recreation at least once in 2020, which is the highest participation rate on record. According to trail counters in Albuquerque, a 38.7 percent increase in total trail use was seen in April 2020 compared to April 2019 within the City. Visitorship at Elena Gallegos Open Space increased by 49 percent from 2019 to 2020; however, since 2020 is considered an anomaly year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, visitor counts are not expected to continue to increase at this rate. The steady upward trend seen prior to 2020 is expected to continue into the next few years.

The Open Space Visitor Center, located in the Bosque along Coors Blvd, has seen a steady increase in visitors over the last nine years. Although the facility was closed for parts of the year in 2020, visitorship was not significantly affected.

ANTICIPATED SITE IMPROVEMENTS

Since Elena Gallegos Open Space was established, major additions like the reservations areas and the amphitheater have been installed; however, regular maintenance must be conducted on the facilities to keep them up-to-date and able to safely and effectively serve the public. Site deficiencies in maintenance have especially emerged over the last few years as the Open Space has experienced an increase in visitors. The Open Space Division has created a list of anticipated site improvements to address these deficiencies in the near term.

Site improvements include repaving of the Loop Road used to access parking and trailheads, updates to reservation areas, picnic areas, and vault toilets, removal of the barn near the Cottonwood Springs Area, and repairs and improvements along the ADA accessible Cottonwood Springs Trail, including concrete repair and erosion control as well as replacing lattias at the wildlife blind.



A trail with a view to Sandia Crest

TABLE 1. VISITOR STATISTICS

Fiscal Year (FY)	Visitor Count
FY2010	149,453
FY2011	151,953
FY2012	142,200
FY2013	151,642
FY2014	149,545
FY2015	167,944
FY2016	162,642
FY2017	188,452
FY2018	179,413
FY2019	173,202
FY2020	258,109



The main entrance of the Open Space Visitor Center

5. PUBLIC OUTREACH

Public participation in this feasibility study was an important guiding force that highlighted significant aspects of the study and allowed information sharing on concepts, goals, and objectives. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the outreach occurred virtually.

A project website was created to disseminate project information and solicit input through a survey. The website also included contact information and public meeting information.

A public meeting was conducted during summer 2021 that was held both virtually on ZOOM and in-person at the Bear Canyon Senior Center. This Public Meeting was advertised on the City's social media pages as well as placed in the Office of Neighborhood Coordination newsletter and the ad was in both English and Spanish. Mailers were sent to properties within a quarter mile of the Elena Gallegos Open Space. There were 18 in-person participants and 20 virtual participants. Many questions and comments during the meeting pertained to the traffic and road conditions of Simms Park Rd as well as needed site improvements within Elena Gallegos Open Space. A survey was conducted during the meeting as well as posted to the website and on social media for virtual attendees and others to fill out after the meeting. The survey was open for several weeks after the meeting and was also

offered in Spanish. Combined with the in-person surveys, there was a total of 28 responses.

Survey participants responded that they would prioritize trail improvements and repairs as well as parking/repaving efforts when considering the options for site improvements to Elena Gallegos Open Space. Survey participants were somewhat supportive of the idea that an education center would be a positive addition to the Elena Gallegos Open Space. It is recommended to conduct another survey that reaches a wider demographic to gauge the interest in an education center at Elena Gallegos Open Space.

In addition to the public meeting and website, the project team also met with an Advisory Committee specially formed for this feasibility study. The Advisory Committee consisted of members who represent organizations that take a special interest in City of Albuquerque Open Space. These organizations included the Open Space Alliance, the Open Space Advisory Board of Directors, Open Space Trail Watch, The Wilderness Society, City Councilor's office, High Desert HOA, and other neighbors of Elena Gallegos Open Space.

The Advisory Committee held a total of four meetings throughout the spring, summer, and fall of 2021. As the project progressed, Advisory Committee members reviewed the work and provided timely and sensible feedback that helped the project to move into further stages.



6. PRECEDENT PROJECTS

Visitor center models have been changing in recent years to follow societal shifts in how information is accessed and how public spaces are used. The internet and smartphones are allowing greater access to information that would normally be provided by brochures and other paper media by staff at a formal desk within the visitor center. In order to adjust to the new visitor experience, a different approach to these spaces includes more hands-on activities, digital interpretive exhibits, and classrooms to draw visitors and residents into a place. With this in mind, using the term 'Education Center' rather than 'Visitor Center' better reflects the user experience and communicates to the public the purpose of the facility.

The City of Albuquerque Major Public Open Space is a network of properties that represent the diversity of landscapes within Albuquerque and its environs ranging from open mesa to the west to the Rio Grande Valley to the foothills and mountains to the east. These spaces enhance the urban environment and provide wildlife habitat while offering opportunities through outdoor education and low-impact recreation.

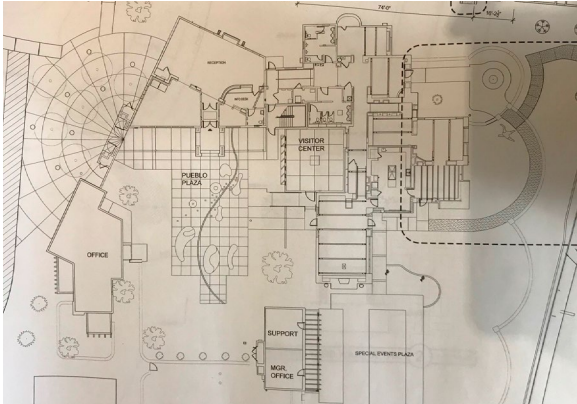
The following precedent projects are examples of visitor/education centers throughout the Albuquerque area that showcase the natural environment of the Bosque and invite the community to observe and learn about the flora and

fauna of the environments found within the area while offering a variety of engaging programming for visitors and residents. All four precedent projects are located near or within the Bosque that surrounds the Rio Grande, with three located within City of Albuquerque Open Space and the fourth, Valle de Oro, designated as a National Wildlife Refuge and managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.



The view over the agricultural fields towards the Sandia Mountains from a viewing platform at the Open Space Visitor Center located off of Coors Blvd on the west side of Albuquerque

OPEN SPACE VISITOR CENTER (COORS BLVD)



The Open Space Visitor Center acts as an interpretive hub for the 30,000 acres of Open Space land that the City manages. It is located off of Coors Blvd in the northwest area of Albuquerque and encompasses 55 acres including agricultural land. The Open Space Visitor Center manages approximately 18 acres of agricultural land for the benefit of wildlife and provides wildlife viewing areas; crops grown feed winter migratory birds and other local wildlife, including pollinators. The Open Space Visitor Center also provides access to Bosque hiking trails along the west side of the Rio Grande. Visitor count in 2019 totaled 19,431.

The Open Space Visitor Center is 5,775 square feet of space and features an art gallery, permanent educational exhibits, a theater, family area, wildlife viewing, and a front desk staffed with volunteer docents. Additionally, volunteers maintain the outdoor gardens, including the Traditions Garden,

Permaculture Gardens, Pueblo Courtyard, and orchards.

Year-round public events and educational opportunities occur at the Open Space Visitor Center, including Open Space Explorer Camp, school field trips, weekly yoga, rotating art exhibits, outdoor concerts, guided nature walks, and presentations.

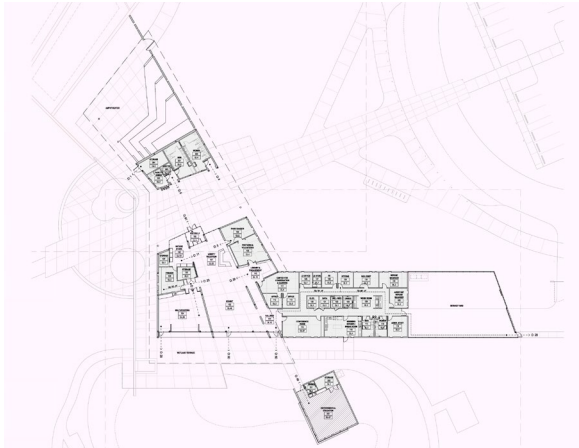


An exhibit room inside the Open Space Visitor Center



The courtyard at the Open Space Visitor Center

VALLE DE ORO VISITOR CENTER



Valle de Oro, at 570 acres adjacent to the Bosque in the South Valley, is the State's newest National Wildlife Refuge. Acquisition of the land was completed in 2014 along with significant water rights in order to restore the riparian wetland habitat along the Middle Rio Grande and serve as an opportunity to showcase environmental stewardship near a large urban center.

The Valle de Oro Visitor Center is a 10,065 square foot facility that was recently completed in 2021. The new space houses exhibit spaces, and amphitheater, educational classrooms, and offices for community partners involved in the conservation effort. An interpretive wetland is located adjacent to the Visitor Center and will allow visitors to experience a southwestern riverine wetland through the building's windows and outdoor paths. Sustainable design strategies are incorporated into the building

design including rainwater harvesting, an on-site wastewater treatment system, renewable energy systems such as photovoltaic panels, dark sky compliance, and bird-friendly design and materials. This facility costed approximately \$7 million, which was all federal funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service.



A rendering of Valle de Oro Visitor Center by Surroundings Studio



A rendering of Valle de Oro Visitor Center by Surroundings Studio

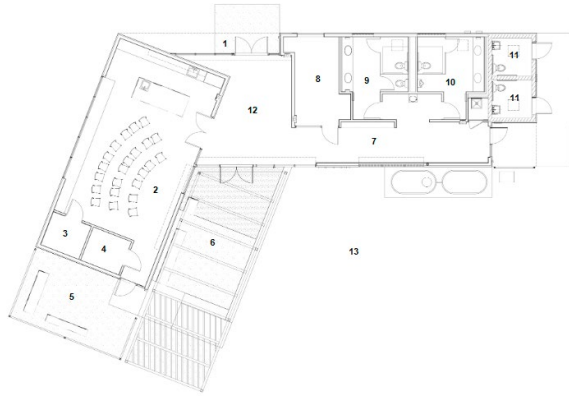


A rendering of Valle de Oro Visitor Center by Surroundings Studio



A rendering of Valle de Oro Visitor Center by Surroundings Studio

BACHECHI OPEN SPACE - BACHECHI ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION BUILDING



Managed by Bernalillo County Open Space, Bachechi Open Space is a 29-acre area adjacent to the Rio Grande Bosque and Rio Grande Valley State Park in the North Valley at the intersection of Alameda Blvd and Rio Grande Blvd.

This site was originally a private farm belonging to the Bachechi family and was subsequently used as a commercial equestrian operation in the mid-1970s. After the County purchased the property, cleared the existing dilapidated structures, and began environmental remediation for contaminated soil, a Master Plan was developed to redevelop the Bachechi property and enhance the connections to the adjacent Alameda Open Space property.

The Bachechi Open Space Master Plan includes environmental educational opportunities such as wildlife viewing, hiking, multi-use trails, an

outdoor classroom, improved and dedicated equestrian parking, xeric and native landscaping, an expanded pecan orchard, a memorial rose garden, an expanded wetland, and an agricultural field to attract migratory waterfowl. The site features interpretive signage throughout a network of trails that addresses the site's historical and ecological resources.

The Bachechi Environmental Education Building (BEEB), also part of this Master Plan, was completed in 2011 as a community facility intended to support environmental education and resource-based recreation on the premises. As the County's first photovoltaic-powered building, BEEB is 2,200 square feet and is designed to function as an extension of the site experience, offering a space for workshops, meetings, presentations, and classes. Bernalillo County Open Space staff support is limited; however, any class, group, or organization that meets the Open Space objective for BEEB can use the facility free of charge. Along with the photovoltaic panels, a water collection system collects all roof water for use in the courtyard gardens. The building is also designed to provide natural ventilation and maximize daylighting to reduce energy costs.



Interior photo of BEEB



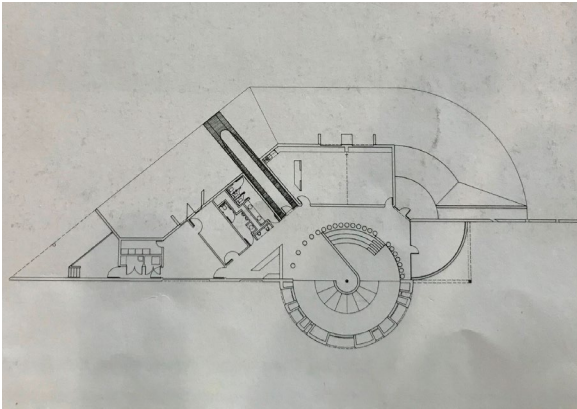
Classroom space featuring a kitchenette at BEEB



Exterior view of the west elevation at BEEB

Environmental Education Building
WEST ENTRY
WEST ELEVATION

RIO GRANDE NATURE CENTER STATE PARK



New Mexico State Parks manages the Rio Grande Nature Center located in the Major Public Open Space network of properties along the Rio Grande Bosque. The area spans 270 acres with trails, indoor and outdoor wildlife viewing areas overlooking ponds, native plant gardens, and an outdoor classroom space.

Like many wildlife areas along the Rio Grande, the Rio Grande Nature Center is located along the central Rio Grande Flyway and offers excellent bird watching year-round. Trails within the park connect to trails along the Rio Grande bosque, including the popular City-managed Paseo del Bosque Trail. Events and activities hosted at the Park include nature walks, bird walks, storytelling, monthly public programs, and family-friendly festivals.

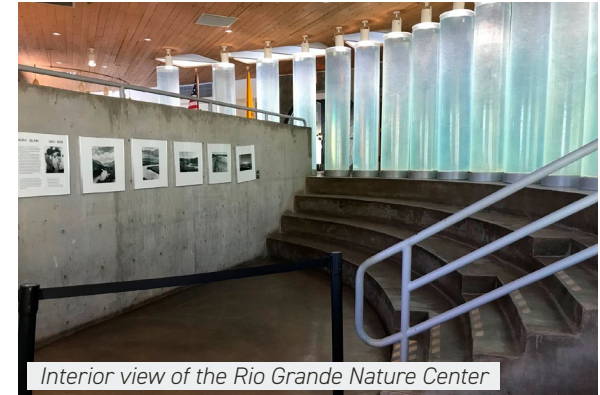
The Park's Visitor Center was designed by world-renowned architect Antoine Predock and completed

in 1982. It is situated in the landscape so that it overlooks a wildlife viewing pond with a glass-walled observation room featuring a speaker system that transmits the pond sounds into the room. In this way wildlife can be observed without being disturbed. The Visitor Center also offers interpretive exhibits and a Nature Shop.

The original building offered 4,910 square feet of space with two subsequent expansions. One expansion includes a separate education building that offers 5,500 square feet of space to meet the educational needs of visitors, especially classroom field trips. This structure was designed to be multifunctional, containing offices, classrooms, and meeting rooms and uses green building techniques including photovoltaic panels resulting in net-zero energy use.



The entrance to the Rio Grande Nature Center



Interior view of the Rio Grande Nature Center



Exterior view of the Rio Grande Nature Center



Indoor wildlife viewing area at the Rio Grande Nature Center

[THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY]

7. COMPARATIVE SITE ANALYSIS

This comparative site analysis is part of an Open Space Visitor Center Feasibility Study that looks at the potential to locate an education center in the foothills area of Albuquerque using a high-level analysis. Five of the sites evaluated are all located within Elena Gallegos Open Space, Site 6 is located on an Open Space-owned parcel called "Simms Parcel" at the intersection of Tramway Blvd and Simms Park Rd.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

All sites are evaluated by the following criteria:

- > *Vehicular access*
- > *Impacts on immediate site and adjacent areas (cultural resources, natural resources)*
- > *Circulation and parking (existing and potential)*
- > *Infrastructure Connections*
- > *Viewsheds*
- > *Neighborhood impact*
- > *Site Suitability (proximity to Open Space, attraction to visitors)*

The following is a brief explanation of what each criterion evaluates.

VEHICULAR ACCESS

This criterion measures how accessible the site is to various modes of transportation.

IMPACTS ON IMMEDIATE SITE AND ADJACENT AREAS

On-site development can impact and disturb the surrounding site and needs to be considered when selecting a suitable area for development. This criterion evaluates impacts on existing natural resources such as existing vegetation, drainage, and floodplains as well as culturally significant resources.

CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Proximity to the existing roads and parking is a desirable quality for the site. This criterion evaluates the proximity to existing roads and parking and the potential to add access roads and parking. However, if a site is located in an already congested area, this would contribute to a deduction of ranking points.

INFRASTRUCTURE CONNECTIONS

This criterion measures proximity of infrastructure connections including electricity and water and sewer.

Sanitary sewer service for the education center can take several forms: extensions of SAS from the park attendant booth, a septic tank/leach field, or a cistern that is periodically pumped. The most cost effective system is a septic tank and leach field; however, a full geotechnical report can determine if this system is feasible at the determined site location and can be designed to comply with City of Albuquerque and State guidelines. The extension of

sanitary sewer from its closest location is the most expensive and has the least maintenance burden. The cistern system is considered the least desirable as frequent pumping may be necessary and odors may become an issue. PNM has plans to update the electricity cable to the Elena Gallegos Open Space, located near the Cottonwood Springs area.

VIEWSHEDS

Elena Gallegos sits above the city with stunning views towards the city and Rio Grande Valley to the west as well as the Sandia Mountains to the north, south, and east. Viewsheds are a potential asset to the future education center to draw the public to the Open Space. This criterion evaluates the quality of the viewshed for each site.

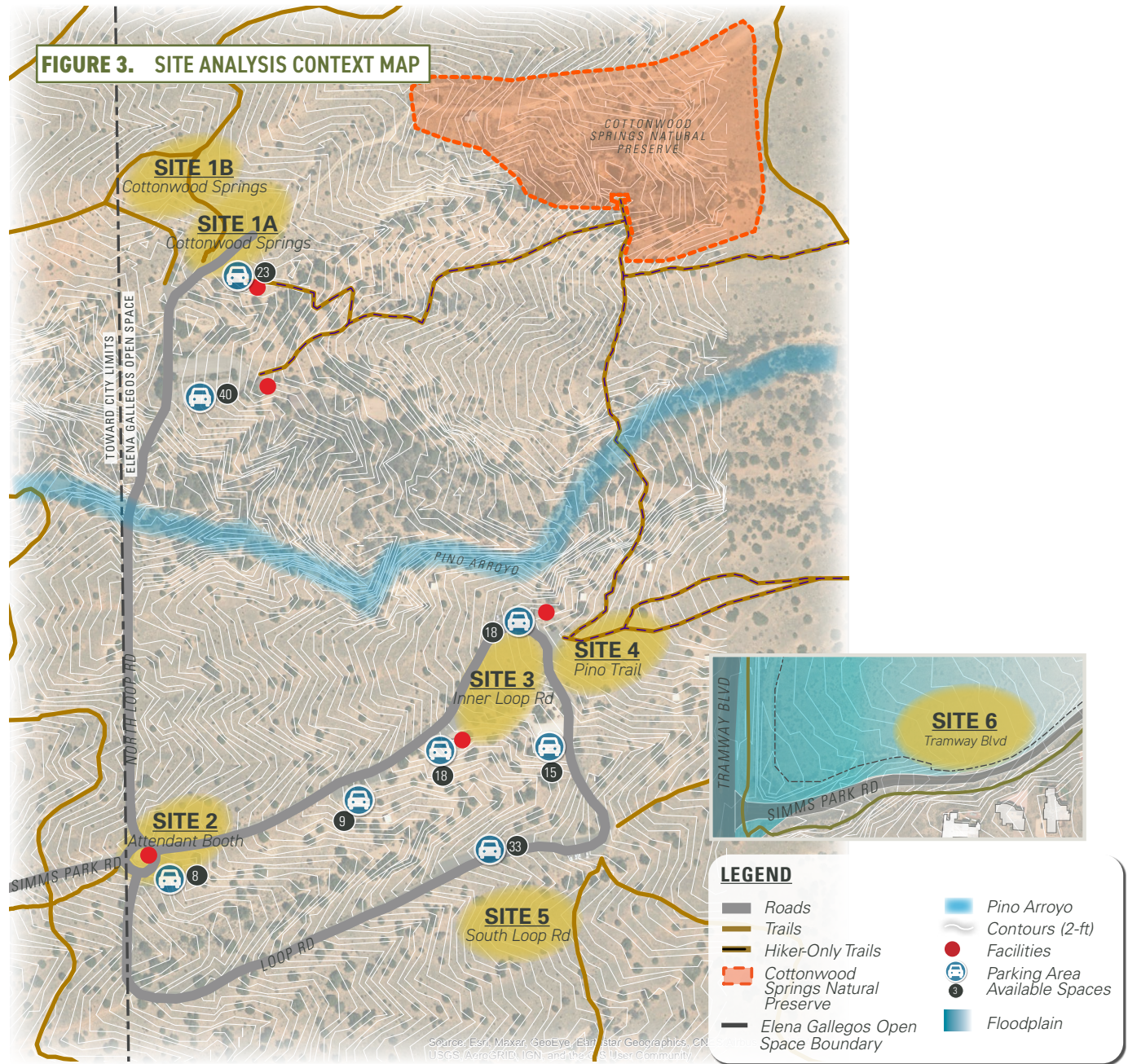
NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACT

Elena Gallegos Open Space is located at the edge of the High Desert neighborhood. Impacts from development, including increased traffic and changes to their views must be considered when selecting an appropriate site. This criterion evaluates the potential impact on neighboring residential uses.

SITE SUITABILITY

Elena Gallegos Open Space is located in an area with a number of regionally important trails that attract outdoor enthusiasts who live in the Albuquerque metro area as well as visitors from regions further afield. This criterion evaluates regional accessibility and proximity to the Open Space and associated amenities, including trails, picnic areas, and reservation areas.

FIGURE 3. SITE ANALYSIS CONTEXT MAP



SITE ANALYSIS

The following is a detailed analysis of the six sites according to the seven evaluation criteria listed above.

Site 1A - Cottonwood Springs

Site 1A, called Cottonwood Springs because of its proximity to the natural spring near the site, lies to the north of the main vehicular loop at Elena Gallegos Open Space along the North Spur Rd, as illustrated in "[Figure 4. Site 1A: Cottonwood Springs](#)" on page 25. Site 1A lies directly over the current parking at the end of the North Spur Rd.

Vehicular Access

While not visible from the park attendant booth and separated from the main vehicular circulation of the Loop Road, the site is connected to the park attendant booth by an existing asphalt road called the North Spur Rd. This road is narrow and passes over the Pino Arroyo, where signs indicate to not cross arroyo during flooding or heavy rains. Significant improvements to the roadway would be required if Site 1A were selected.

Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Areas

The site is also located adjacent to the trailhead for the existing ADA accessible Cottonwood Springs Trail, which connects to a wildlife blind that overlooks Cottonwood Springs. Cottonwood Springs is a natural spring that is the only water

source in the immediate vicinity and features a well and a pump. The derelict remains of a corral and associated stables stand approximately 120 feet northeast of the gravel parking lot where Site 1A is located. This area is closed to the public with no trails existing within the Cottonwood Springs and stables area to protect the migratory bird populations and other wildlife in the area. Although Site 1A is not located within the area closed off to the public, the development impacts of an education center may still be felt at such a close proximity.

A cultural resource survey conducted for the study area identified an archaeological site located around the Site 1A area. Further evaluation to determine the potential impacts of new construction will need to be completed before any ground disturbance occurs if Site 1A is selected.

Circulation and Parking

The road that leads to Site 1A, the North Spur Rd, is a narrow dead-end asphalt road. Significant improvements to this road would be required if this site were selected to accommodate the additional traffic circulation. Parking in this area features 23 parking spaces as well as another 40 spaces in the gravel lot for the Kiwanis Park Reservation Area approximately 300 feet to the south. This is a significant amount of existing parking that would be able to adequately serve an education center at this site.

Infrastructure Connections

Site 1A offers close connections to both electricity that runs along the North Spur Rd from the stables and water from the pump house. There is no sanitary sewer in Elena Gallegos Open Space.

Viewsheds

Site 1A features good views to the Sandia Mountains and surrounding foothills. However, this area sits at a slightly lower elevation than the land to the north and west so that views towards the city and Mount Taylor are largely obscured.

Neighborhood Impact

This location is nestled into the existing topography and surrounding Pinon-Juniper Woodland so that residential development to the west is largely obscured.

Site Suitability

The site is located in close proximity to two trailheads, although the trail to the north of the site is less frequently used compared to the trails along the Loop Rd to the south. The only ADA accessible trail within the Open Space, the Cottonwood Springs Trail, is a well-maintained trail that is used frequently, according to park attendants.

Visibility to new visitors is limited in this location, as it is not visible from the entrance at the park attendant booth and is not along the more heavily trafficked Loop Rd.

FIGURE 4. SITE 1A: COTTONWOOD SPRINGS

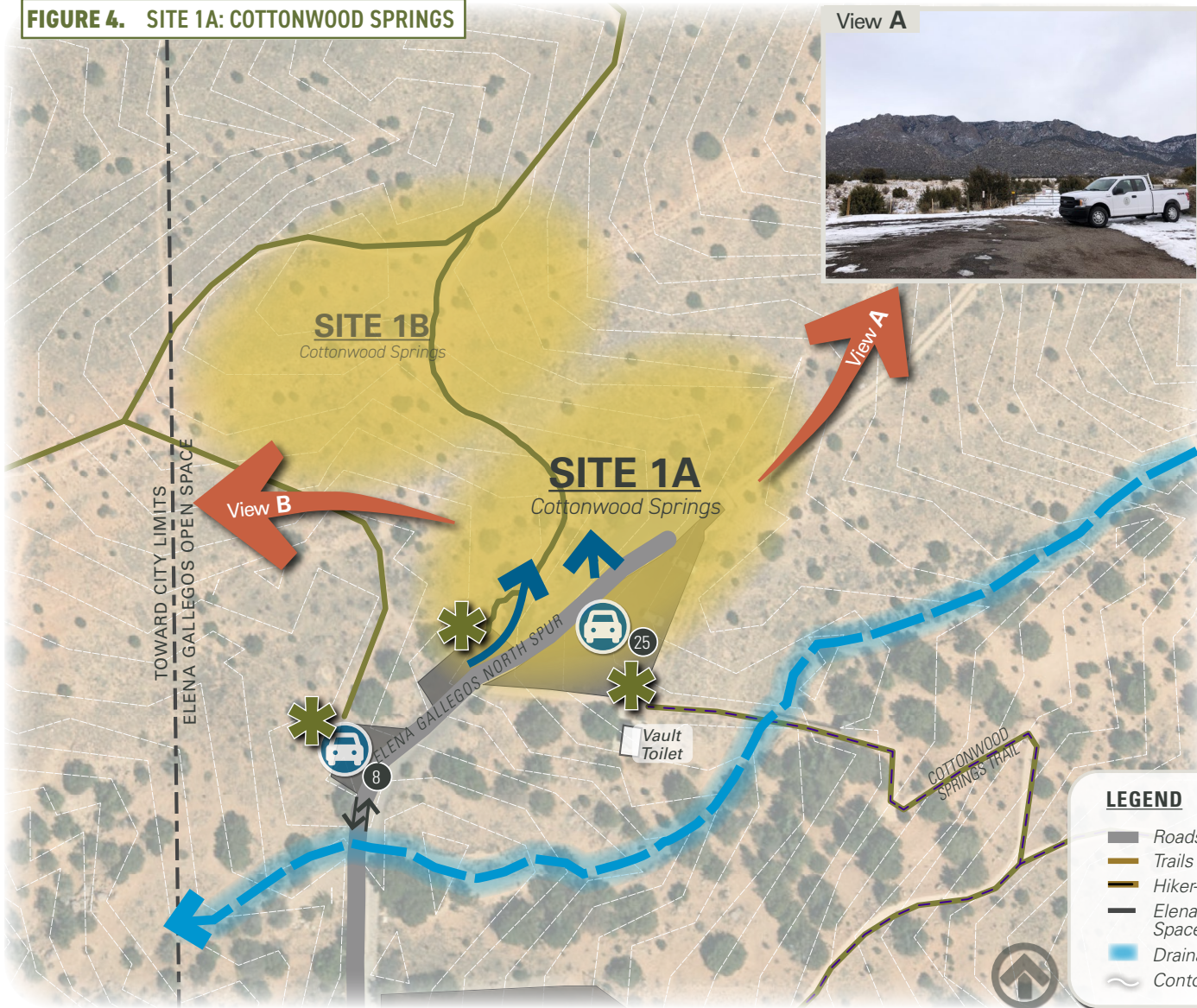


TABLE 2. SITE 1A: COTTONWOOD SPRINGS

Criteria	Score
Vehicular Access	2
Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Land	2
Circulation and Parking	2
Infrastructure Connections	3
Viewsheds	1
Neighborhood Impact	3
Site Suitability	2
TOTAL	15

LEGEND

- Roads
- Facilities
- Trails
- Vehicular Access
- Hiker-Only Trails
- Existing Parking with Available Spaces
- Elena Gallegos Open Space Boundary
- Trailhead
- Drainage
- Floodplain
- Contours (2-ft)

Site 1B - Cottonwood Springs

Site 1B, also called Cottonwood Springs because of its proximity to the natural spring near the site, lies to the north of the main vehicular loop at Elena Gallegos Open Space along the North Spur Rd, as illustrated in ["Figure 5. Site 1B: Cottonwood Springs" on page 27.](#)

Vehicular Access

While not visible from the park attendant booth and separated from the main vehicular circulation at the Loop Road, the site is connected to the park attendant booth by an existing asphalt road called the North Spur Rd. This road is narrow and passes over the Pino Arroyo, where signs indicate to not cross arroyo during flooding or heavy rains. Significant improvements to the roadway would be required if Site 1B were selected.

Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Areas

The site is also located near the trailhead for the existing ADA accessible Cottonwood Springs Trail, which connects to a wildlife blind that overlooks Cottonwood Springs. Cottonwood Springs is a natural spring that is the only water source in the immediate vicinity and features a well and a pump. The derelict remains of a corral and associated stables stand approximately 650 feet east of the gravel parking lot. This area is closed to the public with no trails existing within the Cottonwood Springs and stables area to protect the migratory bird populations and other wildlife in the area. Site 1B

is located a good distance away from any drainage areas.

A cultural resource survey conducted for the study area identified an archaeological site located around the Site 1B area. Further evaluation to determine the potential impacts of new construction will need to be completed before any ground disturbance occurs if Site 1B is selected.

Circulation and Parking

The road that leads to Site 1B, the North Spur Rd, is a narrow dead-end asphalt road. Significant improvements to this road would be required if this site were selected to accommodate the additional traffic circulation. Existing parking in this area features 23 parking spaces as well as another 40 spaces in the gravel lot for the Kiwanis Park Reservation Area approximately 400 feet to the south. The education center could be located on a slight clearing northwest of the existing gravel parking lot located at the end of asphalt road. Although the site is located near 63 existing parking spaces, area for any additional parking could be accommodated near the site, with ADA and bus parking provided.

Infrastructure Connections

Site 1B offers close connections to both electricity that runs along the North Spur Rd from the stables and water from the pump house. There is no sanitary sewer in Elena Gallegos Open Space.

Viewsheds

Site 1B features magnificent views to the Sandia Mountains and surrounding foothills as well as unobscured views to the west towards the city and Mount Taylor.

Neighborhood Impact

This location sits on slightly higher ground than Site 1A with some residences approximately 2,000 feet to the west.

Site Suitability

The site is located in close proximity to two trailheads, although the trails to the north of the site are less frequently used compared to the trails along the Loop Rd. The only ADA accessible trail within the Open Space, the Cottonwood Springs Trail, is a well-maintained trail that is used frequently, according to Park Attendants, with a trailhead located at the Cottonwood Spings parking lot.

Visibility to new visitors to the Open Space is somewhat limited in this location, as it is not visible from the entrance at the park attendant booth and is not along the more heavily trafficked Loop Rd. However, the site sits on higher ground that would be visible from the Pino Trailhead.

FIGURE 5. SITE 1B: COTTONWOOD SPRINGS

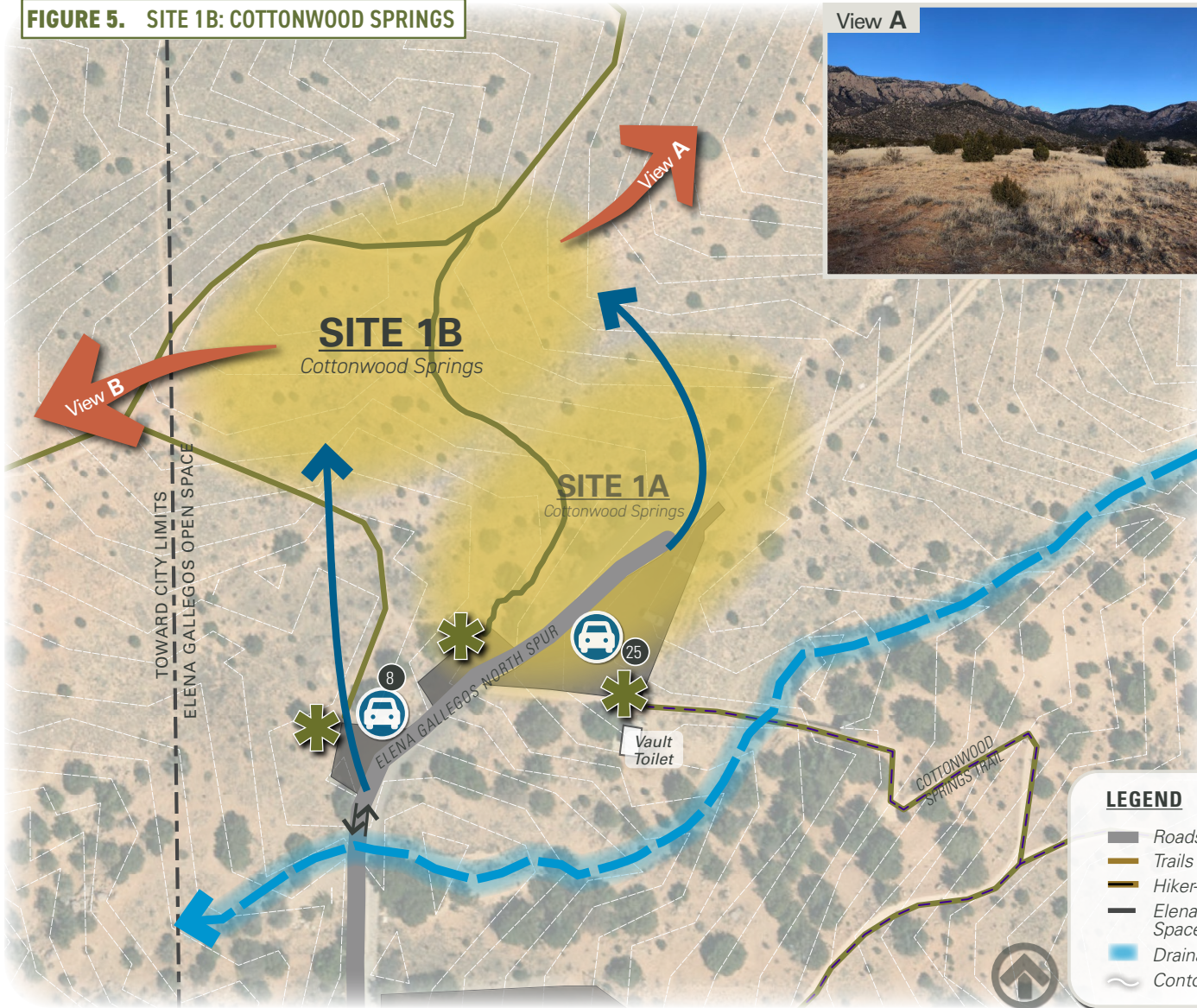


TABLE 3. SITE 1B: COTTONWOOD SPRINGS

Criteria	Score
Vehicular Access	1
Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Land	3
Circulation and Parking	2
Infrastructure Connections	3
Viewsheds	3
Neighborhood Impact	3
Site Suitability	2
TOTAL	17

LEGEND

- Roads
- Trails
- Hiker-Only Trails
- Elena Gallegos Open Space Boundary
- Drainage
- Contours (2-ft)
- Facilities
- Vehicular Access
- Existing Parking with Available Spaces
- Trailhead
- Floodplain

Site 2 - Park Attendant Booth

Site 2 lies at the vehicular entry point to Elena Gallegos and the four-way intersection of varying asphalt drives where the park attendant booth is currently located, as illustrated in ["Figure 6. Site 2: park attendant booth" on page 29.](#)

Vehicular Access

The existing park attendant booth lies in the center of a traffic circle where the four drives intersect and approximately eight parking spaces lay at the perimeter to the east and northeast.

Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Areas

Since this site already has existing infrastructure, impacts to the immediate site and adjacent areas in regard to cultural and natural resources is minimal. The nearby drainage way may be affected by a building at this location.

Circulation and Parking

An education center could be located to the northeast of the existing park attendant booth but would likely require the re-configuration of the existing vehicular circulation, work that may already be necessary due to potential increased traffic flow in the Elena Gallegos Open Space area. Existing parking is extremely limited, with only 8 spaces available that are partly restricted to "Official Use Only" vehicles. This area is at a crossroads and therefore already experiences heavy traffic.

New trails could connect the prospective visitor center to existing trails towards the east, but no existing pedestrian circulation exists.

Infrastructure Connections

The park attendant booth has both electricity and water available via a pump house line.

Viewsheds

The site features similar stunning views to the Sandia Mountains, surrounding foothills, and the city and Mount Taylor to the west.

Neighborhood Impact

This site is highly visible from residential development as it sits atop a ridge. The nearest residence is located approximately 1,000 feet to the southwest.

Site Suitability

The site exhibits flora typical of the Pinon-Juniper Woodland and is not particularly close to any trailheads. It is, however, highly visible to new visitors as it is located at the entrance to the Open Space.

FIGURE 6. SITE 2: PARK ATTENDANT BOOTH

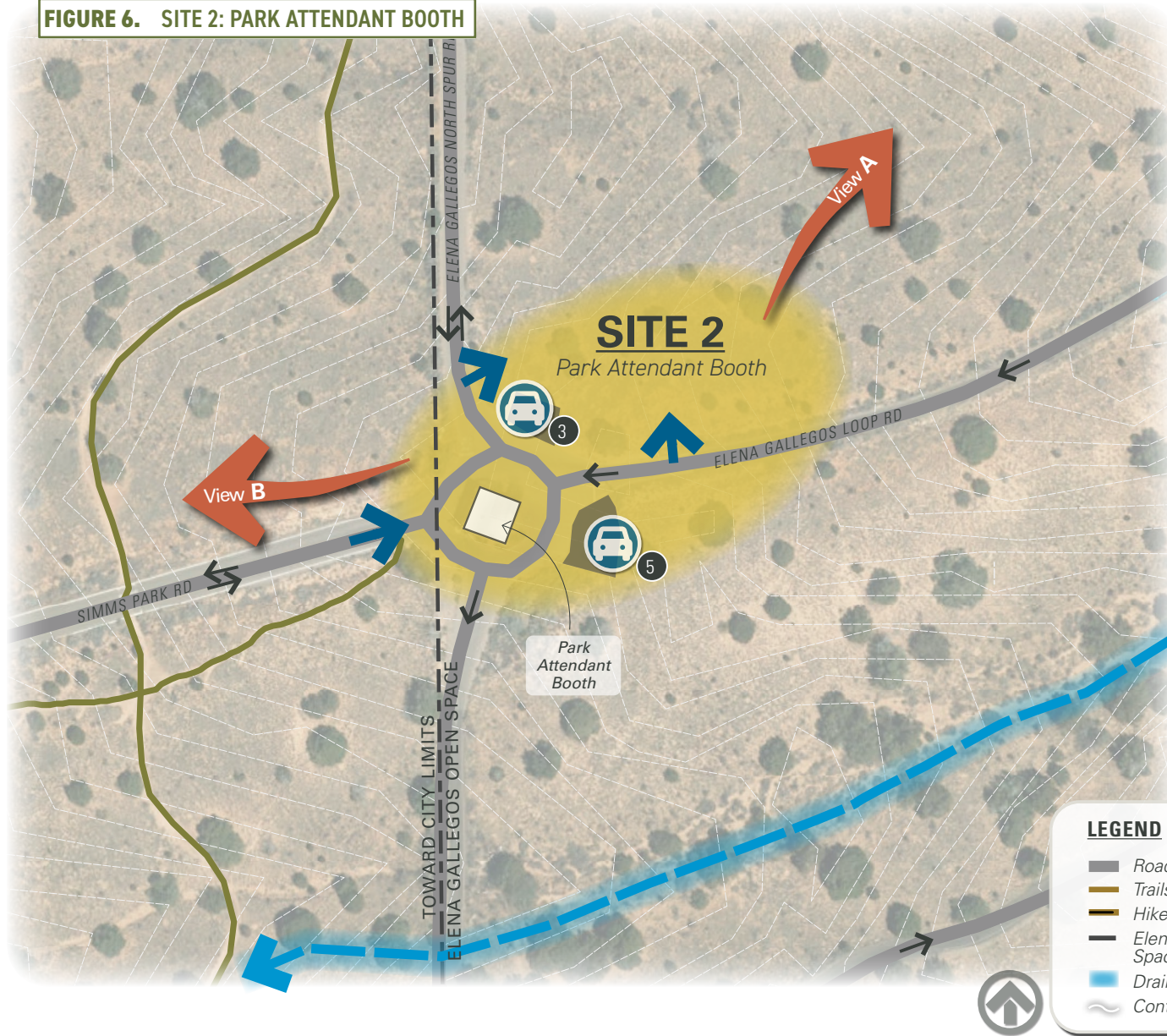


TABLE 4. SITE 2: PARK ATTENDANT BOOTH

Criteria	Score
Vehicular Access	2
Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Land	2
Circulation and Parking	1
Infrastructure Connections	3
Viewsheds	3
Neighborhood Impact	1
Site Suitability	2
TOTAL	14

LEGEND

- Roads
- Facilities
- Trails
- Vehicular Access
- Hiker-Only Trails
- Existing Parking with Available Spaces
- Elena Gallegos Open Space Boundary
- Trailhead
- Drainage
- Floodplain
- Contours (2-ft)

Site 3 - Inner Loop Rd

Site 3 lies within the northern stretch of the existing one-way asphalt Loop Rd in a clearing that is commonly used as a landing area for helicopters involved in mountain rescue operations, as illustrated in ["Figure 7. Site 3: Inner Loop Rd" on page 31.](#)

Vehicular Access

Vehicular access to Site 3 is provided via the Loop Rd. Since this site is nestled adjacent in the existing curve of the Loop Rd, access is exceptional.

Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Areas

Social trails and other evidence of cross-cutting exist within the immediate area. The Double Shelter picnic area and the amphitheater to the south will be retained and will serve as additional amenities in close proximity to an education center. A minor drainage way is located very close to the site and would be affected by a building.

Circulation and Parking

Excellent vehicular circulation already exists in this location provided by existing parking and Loop Rd. Approximately 18 existing parking spaces for trails lay to the north and east along the Loop Rd. Another 27 spaces for the amphitheater and Double Shelter lay west of the site along the Loop Rd as well as 15 spaces to the south of the site. If more than 60 spaces is needed for the education center, providing

this additional parking may prove challenging due to the more developed location, but some opportunities exist to the west along the Loop Rd.

Because this area already features many well-used amenities, such as the Pino Trailhead, parking, vault toilets, double shelter reservation area, and the amphitheater, circulation and parking can be congested during busy times of the year.

Infrastructure Connections

Site 3 is located between Double Shelter and the vault toilets near the Pino Trailhead that both have an electricity connection. Water, however, is only available seasonally to the drinking water fountain to the northeast of Site 3 at the Pino Trailhead.

Viewsheds

This site features similar stunning views to the Sandia Mountains, surrounding foothills, and the city and Mount Taylor to the west.

Neighborhood Impact

This site is visible from residential development, although it is set back at a further distance than other potential sites, which would lend to reduced noise levels.

Site Suitability

More abundant Pinon and Juniper growth shield this site from the park attendant booth further to the west, reducing visibility upon entrance. However,

as visitors travel along the Loop Rd, an education center would be visible along the eastern horizon. Notably, locating the education center to the west of the existing drive would maintain a threshold between the trails and nature to the east and the roads and other structures of the open space to the east.

FIGURE 7. SITE 3: INNER LOOP RD

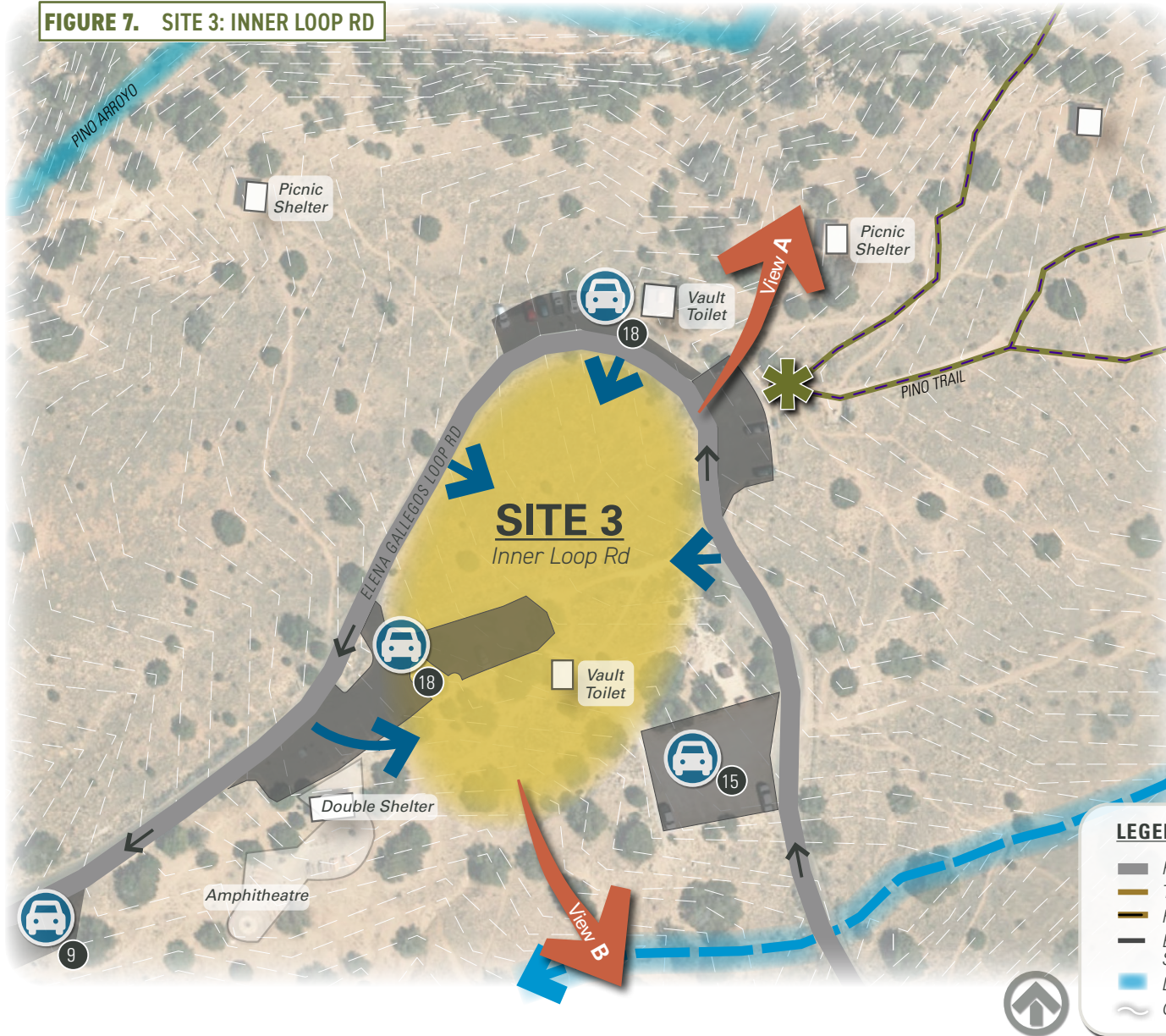


TABLE 5. SITE 3: INNER LOOP RD

Criteria	Score
Vehicular Access	3
Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Land	2
Circulation and Parking	2
Infrastructure Connections	2
Viewsheds	2
Neighborhood Impact	3
Site Suitability	3
TOTAL	17

LEGEND

- Roads
- Trails
- Hiker-Only Trails
- Elena Gallegos Open Space Boundary
- Drainage
- Contours (2-ft)
- Facilities
- Vehicular Access
- Existing Parking with Available Spaces
- Trailhead
- Floodplain

Site 4 - Pino Trail

Site 4 lies east of the Loop Rd where the existing Pino Trailhead is located. This is a hiker-only trail and is frequently used, as this trail provides access to the neighboring Sandia Wilderness to the east, as illustrated in ["Figure 8. Site 4: Pino Trail" on page 33](#).

Vehicular Access

Vehicular access to Site 4 is provided via the Loop Rd. Since this site is located directly adjacent to the main Loop Rd, vehicular access is good.

Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Areas

This site is located on flatter, higher ground than the surrounding area so there is no significant interference with the natural drainage. Pino Trailhead and Trail would need to be relocated. Surrounding picnic shelters would not be impacted by an education center in this location.

Circulation and Parking

Existing parking likely to be utilized by an education center building is identical to Site 3, although the 27 parking spaces near Double Shelter and the amphitheater are at a greater distance to this site and may be less convenient options for visitors. Additional parking may be needed on-site, which can easily be accommodated for with the expansion of the nearby Pino Trailhead parking.

Infrastructure Connections

Electricity connections are located nearby Site 4 at the vault toilets to the northwest of the site. Water, however, is only available seasonally to the drinking water fountain to the northwest of Site 4 at the Pino Trailhead.

Viewsheds

This site features similar dramatic views to the Sandia Mountains, surrounding foothills, and the city and Mount Taylor to the west. Because it sits higher than the surrounding terrain to the north, west, and south, this position offers some good views.

Neighborhood Impact

This site is visible from residential development, although it is set back at a further distance than other potential sites, which would lend to reduced noise levels. Because this area sits at higher ground, neighbors viewsheds may be the most impacted.

Site Suitability

More abundant Pinon and Juniper growth shield this site from the park attendant booth further to the west, reducing visibility upon entrance. However, as visitors travel along the Loop Rd, an education center would be visible along the eastern horizon. Existing trails would need to be reconfigured if the new education center building is located in this area. But similar to Site 3, this area is shielded by vegetation and the topography of the residential development to the west as well as the open space to the south. Notably, building an education center

in this area may encroach upon the feeling of nature to the east of the drive, which feels like a threshold between the more highly developed trailhead area and the natural landscapes of the foothills to the east.

FIGURE 8. SITE 4: PINO TRAIL

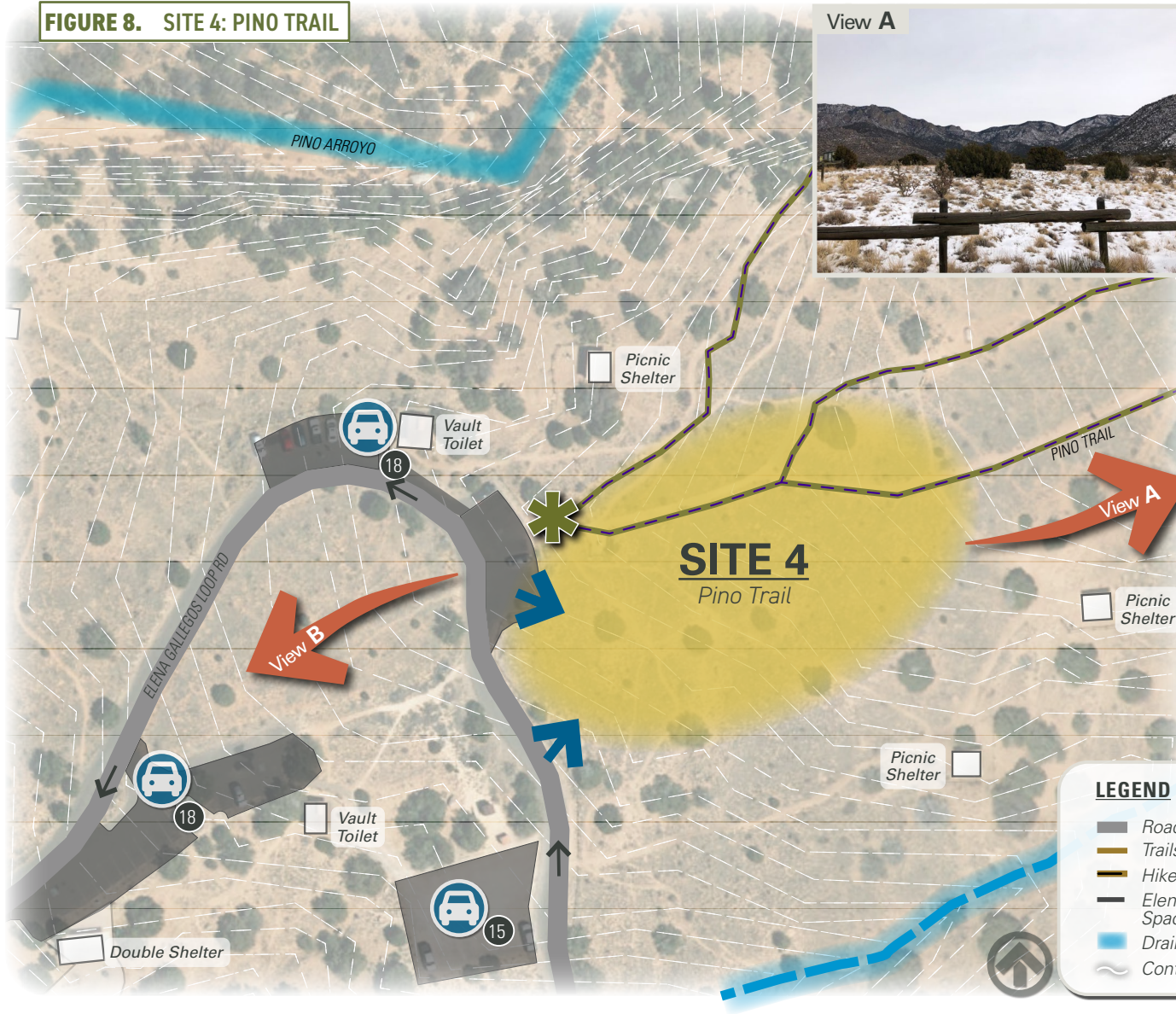


TABLE 6. SITE 4: PINO TRAIL

Criteria	Score
Vehicular Access	2
Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Land	1
Circulation and Parking	2
Infrastructure Connections	3
Viewsheds	2
Neighborhood Impact	3
Site Suitability	3
TOTAL	16

LEGEND

- Roads
- Trails
- Hiker-Only Trails
- Elena Gallegos Open Space Boundary
- Drainage
- Contours (2-ft)
- Facilities
- Vehicular Access
- Existing Parking with Available Spaces
- Trailhead
- Floodplain

Site 5 - South Loop Rd

Site 5 lies to the south of the Loop Rd along a flat area with little vegetation. This area offers sweeping views to the south and west of Bear Canyon and South Sandia Peak, as illustrated in ["Figure 9. Site 5: South Loop Rd" on page 35.](#)

Vehicular Access

While this site is located along the Loop Rd, it is separated by a minor arroyo to the south of the road. Additional access drives would need to be provided to this site, especially considering the requirements of Fire Rescue services to have access around the building.

Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Areas

Since this area sits on flat ground with little vegetation, few natural resources would be disturbed by an education center. However, because of the need to provide vehicular access across the minor arroyo, some drainage patterns may be disturbed.

Circulation and Parking

Site 5 sits near the Loop Rd which provides vehicular circulation as well as 33 existing parking spaces. Additional parking could be added along the Loop Rd towards the west or on-site.

Infrastructure Connections

Site 5 is not located near electricity or water connections. The closest electricity connection is at Double Shelter approximately 450 feet to the north. A water connection, though seasonal, is located at the Pino Trailhead at a drinking water fountain that is 650 feet to the north. These factors lend to poor infrastructure connections for Site 5.

Viewsheds

Site 5 lies to the south of the Loop Rd and also features dramatic views to the Sandia Mountains, surrounding foothills, and the city and Mount Taylor to the west. Uniquely, this site also overlooks Bear Canyon to the south and South Sandia Peak beyond.

Neighborhood Impact

Building an education center in this location would strongly impact views from the west and south. Residences to the west are approximately one-quarter mile away from the site.

Site Suitability

After departing the parking along the Loop Rd, heading south, and crossing through a minor arroyo, this site opens up upon a slight rise. Major trails connect southward and eastward, and park attendants have noted that equestrians commonly park trailers at this location and disembark upon the adjacent trails. Trail systems would likely need to be reconfigured to accommodate an education center. As visitors travel around the Loop Rd after entering at the park attendant booth, an education center

would be highly visible to the south and would attract new visitors. However, regular users of the Open Space may decide to continue on to the Pino Trailhead parking.

FIGURE 9. SITE 5: SOUTH LOOP RD

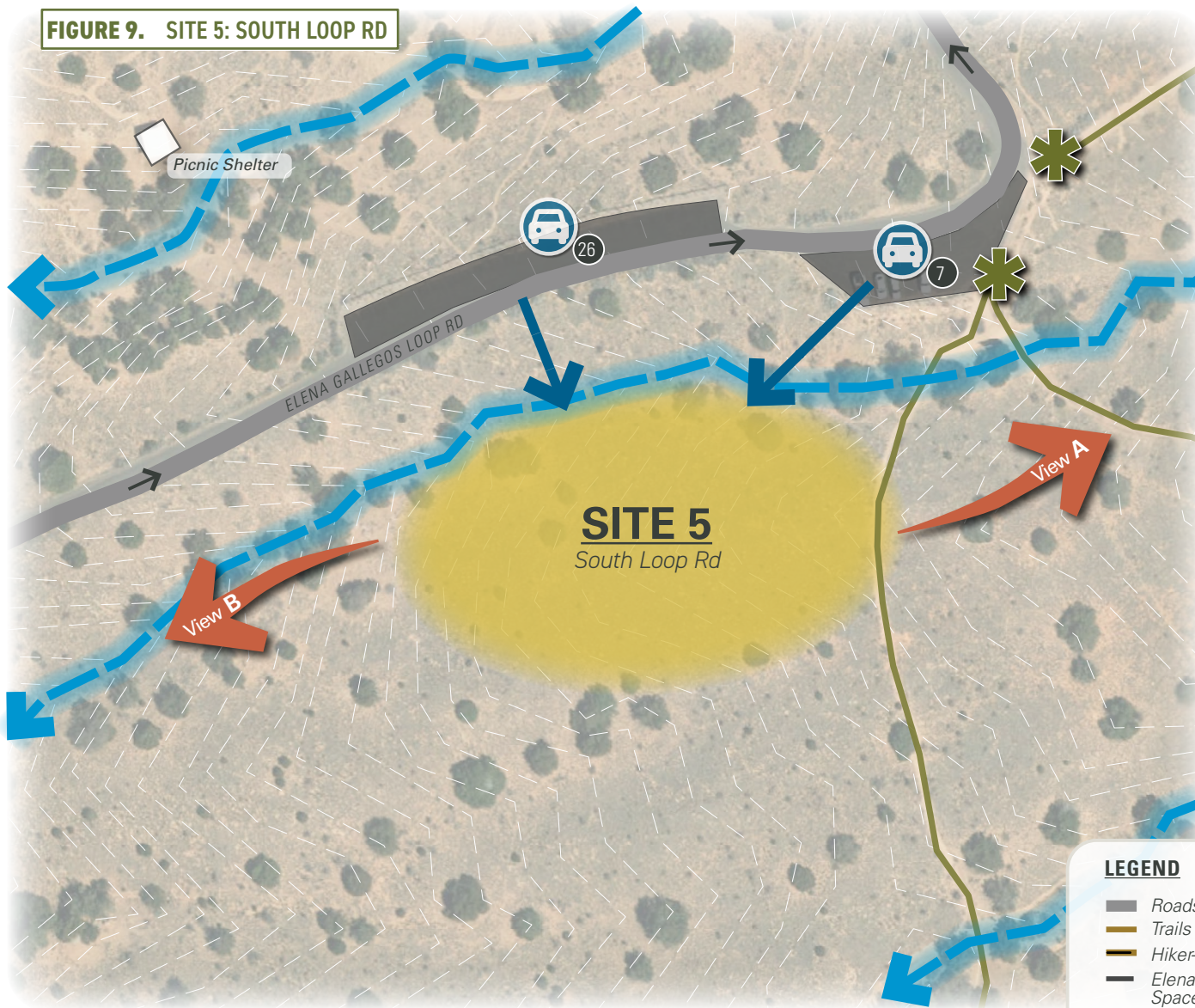


TABLE 7. SITE 5: SOUTH LOOP RD

Criteria	Score
Vehicular Access	2
Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Land	2
Circulation and Parking	2
Infrastructure Connections	1
Viewsheds	3
Neighborhood Impact	2
Site Suitability	2
TOTAL	14

LEGEND

- Roads
- Trails
- Hiker-Only Trails
- Elena Gallegos Open Space Boundary
- Drainage
- Contours (2-ft)
- Facilities
- Vehicular Access
- P Existing Parking with Available Spaces
- * Trailhead
- Floodplain

Site 6 - Tramway Blvd

Situated in the Pino Arroyo drainage area near the intersection of Tramway Blvd and Simms Park Rd, Site 6 offers an ex-urban context with close proximity to development, as illustrated in "[Figure 10. Site 6: Tramway Blvd](#)" on page 37. It is located outside of the Elena Gallegos Open Space boundary on a parcel owned by the Open Space Division and called "Simms Parcel."

Vehicular Access

This site offers excellent vehicular connections and circulation due to its adjacency to Tramway Blvd. Since this site is not located within the Elena Gallegos Open Space, access to trails and other amenities is poor, likely requiring an additional vehicle trip to the Open Space that is about a mile away.

Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Areas

The site is located in the floodplain of the Pino Arroyo and has some areas of erosion. It is unclear if most of the disturbance in the arroyo is due to human activities such as construction and grading or secondary effects such as erosive, condensed flows from the residential development in the foothills to the east. Vegetation is dominated by shrubs such as chamisa and apache plume with perennials and other annuals that thrive in rocky, sandy soils.

Circulation and Parking

Vehicular circulation is easily provided by Tramway Blvd and Simms Park Rd. Tramway Blvd also features a highly used multi-use trail along the east side which could easily be connected to an education center at this location. There is currently no parking provided at this site. All parking would need to be constructed with the education center.

Infrastructure Connections

Electricity and water connections are available near Site 6 because of its proximity to major public infrastructure compared to the more remote Elena Gallegos Open Space.

Viewsheds

The site is largely shielded from western views towards the city by Tramway Boulevard and a lower elevation. However, the site does offer some views of the foothills and the Sandia Mountains, although further away than the other sites.

Neighborhood Impact

Residences on the opposite side of the arroyo floodplain to the north and adjacent to Simms Park Rd to the south are highly visible from the site. Although not interfering with any foothill/mountain viewsheds, an education center would be very close to these homes and would increase noise and traffic levels.

Site Suitability

This site is not located within Elena Gallegos Open Space. It would therefore function more as a regional education center for this area rather than specifically geared towards the Elena Gallegos Open Space. An unpaved trail along the south side of Simms Park Rd is the only trail connection to the Open Space from this location. Improvements to this trail would be needed if an education center was located at this site in order to support these multi-modal connections.

FIGURE 10. SITE 6: TRAMWAY BLVD

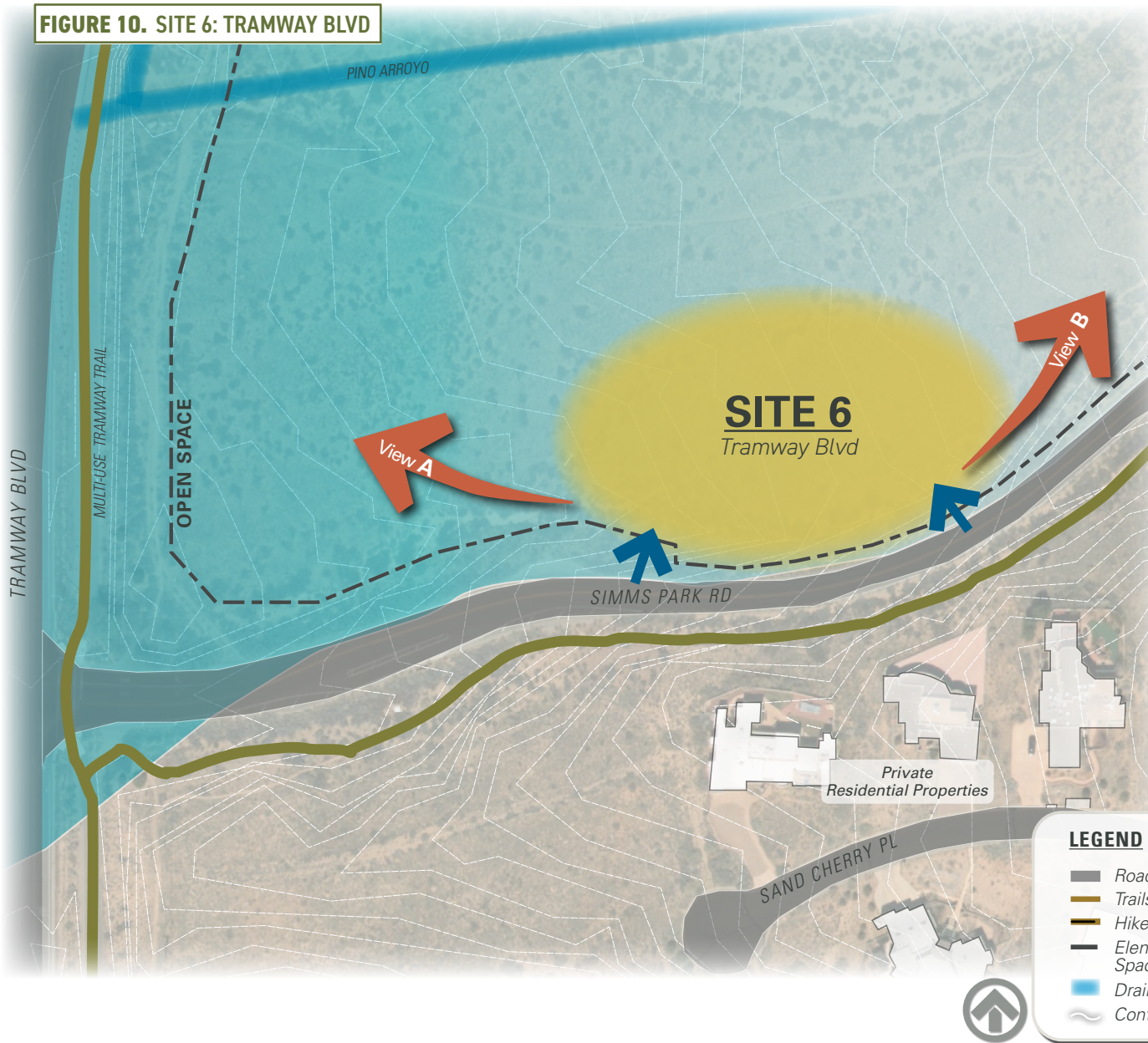


TABLE 8. SITE 6: TRAMWAY BLVD

Criteria	Score
Vehicular Access	3
Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Land	1
Circulation and Parking	3
Infrastructure Connections	3
Viewsheds	1
Neighborhood Impact	1
Site Suitability	1
TOTAL	13

RECOMMENDATION

Using a scoring matrix to rate the sites according to the seven criteria detailed above, it is determined that Site 1B and Site 3 are the best options as both scored the highest at 17 points, as illustrated in ["Table 9. Site Analysis Scoring Matrix" on page 38](#). Site 1B, located north of the park attendant booth by Cottonwood Springs Trailhead, offers an excellent location that does not add to the congestion of the Loop Rd and has excellent views of the surrounding landscapes. It is also close to existing infrastructure connections and popular trailheads. Improvements to the North Spur Rd and additional parking and circulation to this site must be included in site development. Site 3, located within the Loop Rd at the northeastern extent, offers good vehicular access, circulation, and parking with few impacts on the immediate site and adjacent areas. Site 3 is also located in close proximity to trailheads and other existing amenities and has a relatively low impact on neighboring residences.

During the course of evaluating sites, public comment and Advisory Committee feedback indicated that parking is already very tight at the Elena Gallegos Open Space. While evaluating Site 6 for an education center location, it was determined that this site, since already owned by the Open Space Division, may be best suited for a satellite parking lot to provide additional parking for the Open Space. ["8. Additional Analysis" on page 40](#) provides more details on this recommendation.

The Elena Gallegos Open Space, with its established regional draw of regular users and visitors, provides an excellent location for an education center on

TABLE 9. SITE ANALYSIS SCORING MATRIX

Criteria	Site 1A	Site 1B	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6
Vehicular Access	2	1	2	3	2	2	3
Impacts on Immediate Site and Adjacent Land	2	3	2	2	1	2	1
Circulation and Parking	2	2	1	2	2	2	3
Infrastructure Connections	3	3	3	2	3	1	3
Viewsheds	1	3	3	2	2	3	1
Neighborhood Impact	3	3	1	3	3	2	1
Site Suitability	2	2	2	3	3	2	1
TOTAL	15	17	14	17	16	14	13

the east side of Albuquerque that showcases the stunning views as well as the natural and cultural resources of the area. The six sites evaluated at a high-level analysis present a range of options for an education center that take into account vehicular access, impacts on immediate site and adjacent area, circulation and parking, infrastructure connections, viewsheds, neighborhood impact, and site suitability.

[THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY]

8. ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS

ROAD ANALYSIS

Simms Park Rd is the singular vehicular access point to Elena Gallegos Open Space. Simms Park Road is owned and maintained by the City of Albuquerque, including the portion of the road located outside of the Albuquerque City Limits, on the eastern end near Elena Gallegos Open Space, shown in ["Figure 11. Road Analysis" on page 41](#). The condition of the road is fair, with minor cracks and surface deterioration. Simms Park Road is approximately 1.4 miles long from the intersection with Tramway Blvd to the west and the park attendant booth to the east. The public right-of-way is an average of 65 ft wide and widens on the western end near Tramway Blvd while the paved travel lanes are 22 ft wide with no additional paved shoulder. A 5-ft wide compacted dirt trail exists on the south side of the road and accommodates pedestrians and mountain bikers.

The existing 65 ft wide public right-of-way provides an opportunity for improvements to Simms Park Road without requiring further right-of-way dedication. The existing paved travel lanes could be resurfaced and restriped and a 6-ft wide bike lane could be added to both sides of the roadway. The improved pavement width with bike lanes would be 34 ft.

The remaining 31 ft of right-of-way could be improved by enhancing the existing trail on the south side of Simms Park Road. The trail could be stabilized by adding gravel or through compaction. Additional native landscape plantings could be added to the existing natural undeveloped right-of-way.

As the project progressed, it became clear through multiple discussions with Open Space Division staff and the Advisory Committee that additional parking for this facility may be problematic, as the existing parking is often full during weekends and holidays.

Satellite Parking Lot

While some additional handicap parking may need to be provided on-site, this feasibility study recommends a satellite parking lot located at the northeast corner of Tramway Blvd and Simms Park Rd, at a similar location to Site 6, shown in ["Figure 11. Road Analysis" on page 41](#). Improved bike and pedestrian infrastructure is highly recommended in order to safely connect this satellite parking lot with Elena Gallegos Open Space. In addition, a shuttle bus could operate on a schedule that coincides with peak visitor times, such as weekends and holidays, so that easy access is provided to trailheads within Elena Gallegos Open Space. Further study of a parking lot and shuttle bus system is recommended in order to provide for additional parking for an education center facility.

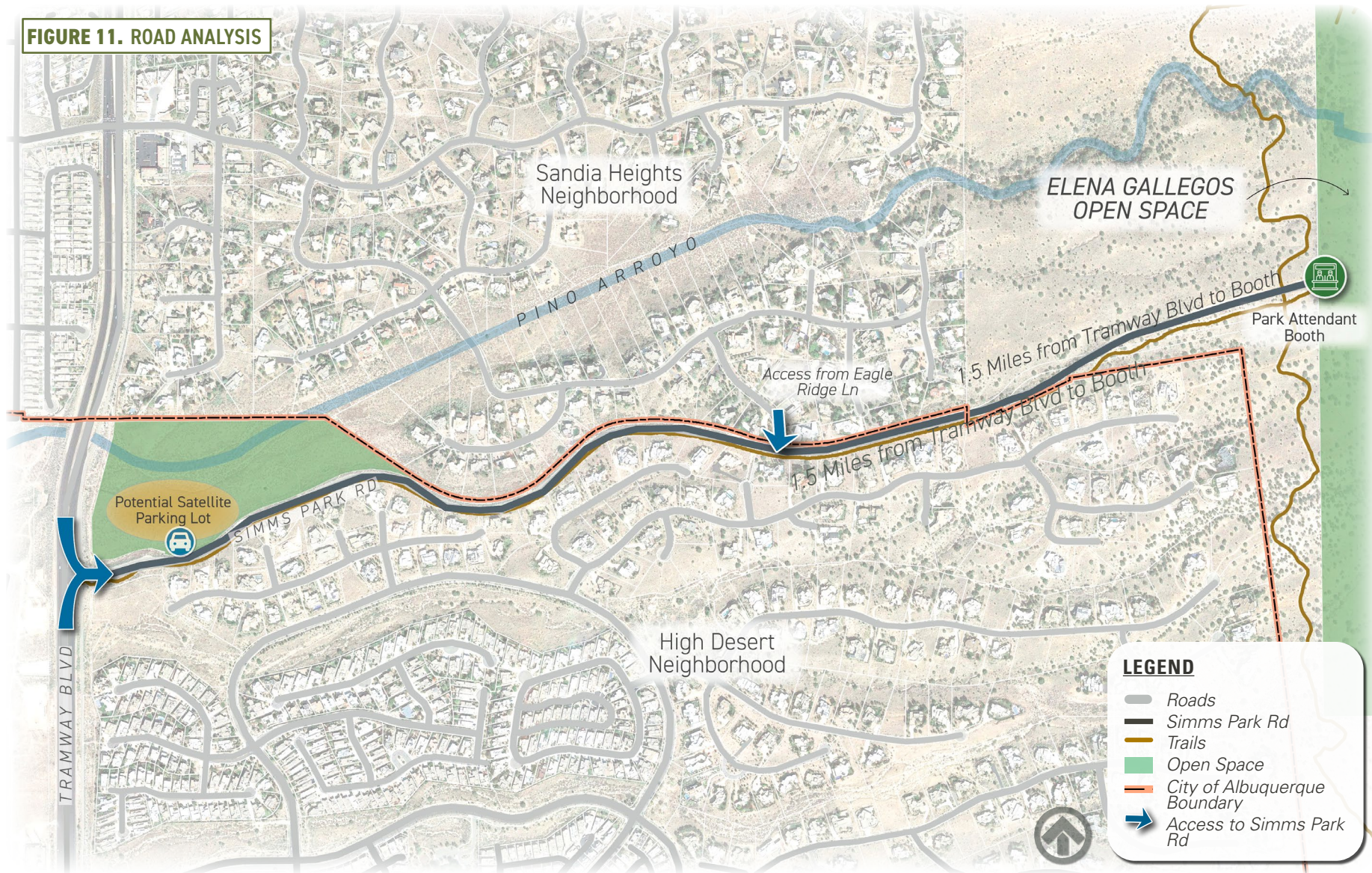
9. SITE/BUILDING PROGRAMMING

This phase of the Feasibility Study identifies the space needs for an education center and generates a corresponding conceptual building footprint and site plan on the recommended site location. Using the preferred site location, the project team created a conceptual program for a facility in the approximate range of 6,000 to 8,000 square feet.

PROGRAM AND ADJACENCY DIAGRAM

Through discussions with Open Space Division staff and the Advisory Committee, a preliminary program of spaces was devised for the education center. These spaces include a classroom space/ education space for 50 participants, offices, lobby, interpretive room and coffee bar, staff meeting room, storage, restrooms, and IT and mechanical space. A commercial kitchen was originally mentioned as a desired space but was combined with the interpretive room and coffee bar in later iterations. To take advantage of the incredible views, a large deck off of the east and north sides provides space for visitors to enjoy the scenery and expansive vistas. ["Table 10. Preliminary Floor Plan Square Footage" on page 42](#) and ["Figure 12. Adjacency Diagram" on page 43](#) offer a conceptual understanding of required square footage for each space and their relationship to each other on the selected site.

FIGURE 11. ROAD ANALYSIS



PRELIMINARY FLOORPLAN AND CONCEPTUAL RENDERING

The project team then created a preliminary floorplan for the building that includes how it can be situated on the recommended sites. Open Space Division staff, the project team, and the Advisory Committee worked to refine the floorplan to best suit the needs of both the staff, who would be operating the building, and the potential users of the space. Staff and the Advisory Committee drew upon their experience with similar Open Space facilities in the Albuquerque area, including Bachechi Environmental Education Building and the Open Space Visitor Center, to create a preliminary floorplan that has appropriately sized spaces to meet user needs, shown in ["Figure 13. Site 3 Parking and Circulation and Preliminary Floorplan"](#) on page 44.

The floorplan works with the natural slope of the site which gives the opportunity for a large deck that allows visitors to take in the surrounding views. The deck then wraps around the side to meet the front entrance of the building. Additional handicap parking spaces are provided in this area. Additional parking is provided in the building's vicinity as well.

A 'nature play' area is situated in an area close to the building; stairs and ADA-compliant ramp are provided from the deck to the ground for access to the nature play area. This area is designed for kids to have an opportunity to engage in unstructured play activities in an outdoor setting where natural elements from the surrounding landscape are intentionally incorporated into a safe play design. Specific design for this nature play

area will coincide with further design stages of the education center. The City of Albuquerque Parks and Recreation Department released their Nature Play Recommendations in September 2021 as a guide to designing a successful nature play area and be used as a reference for design of this area.

In the education center, there is a lobby that spans the width of the building, so that visitors can easily access the outdoor deck after entering through the main entrance. The lobby would host a reception desk and interpretive exhibits throughout the space. A classroom is located to the side of the lobby. The wall between the lobby and classroom is a moveable partition so that classroom space can spill over into the lobby for extra space. An interpretive room and coffee bar opens on the other side of the lobby and also opens to the deck with incredible views of the mountains and city. Restrooms are provided next to the interpretive room and lobby. Offices to accommodate two to three staff are located adjacent to the lobby and main entrance, along with a meeting room for staff. Storage is provided in the classroom and the opposite site of the restrooms, accessible from an outside door. Electrical/IT and mechanical closets are also situated on this side of the building from an outside door.

This floorplan can be adapted to either preferred site, Site 1B or Site 3, as slope and aspect are similar. Additional parking and circulation is necessary at Site 1B. One example is of how this can be configured with existing parking is illustrated in ["Figure 14. Site 1B Parking and Circulation"](#) on page 45.

The conceptual rendering shows a view of the education center looking to the east, with the Sandia Mountains in the background. The building façade shows glass 'curtain walls' that allow for visitors inside the education center to take in expansive views from whether they are in the classroom, lobby, or interpretive room. This glass should be bird-safe so that bird species of the area are kept safe from flying into the glass, as well as anti-reflective and non-glare to reduce reflections. This building should reflect the most up-to-date green building practices and be designed to minimize waste and energy consumption.

TABLE 10. PRELIMINARY FLOOR PLAN SQUARE FOOTAGE

Space	Square Footage
Classroom	1,780
Lobby	960
Interpretive Room/ Coffee Bar	515
Staff Offices	250
Staff Meeting Room	155
Restrooms	525
Storage	300
Electrical/ Mechanical Spaces	315
Outdoor Deck	3,200
Overall Building	4,800
Overall Building with Outdoor Deck	8,000

FIGURE 12. ADJACENCY DIAGRAM

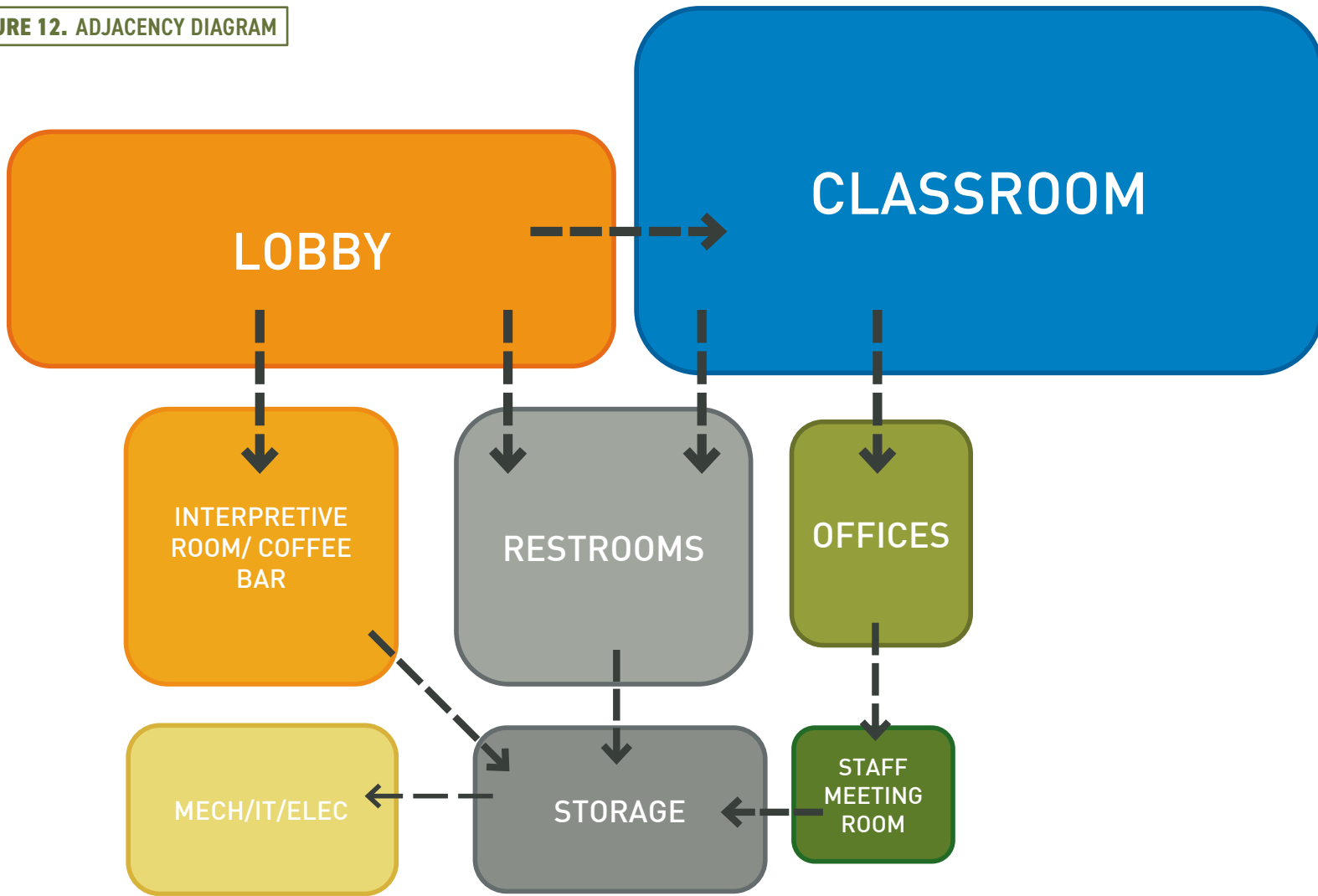


FIGURE 13. SITE 3 PARKING AND CIRCULATION AND PRELIMINARY FLOORPLAN

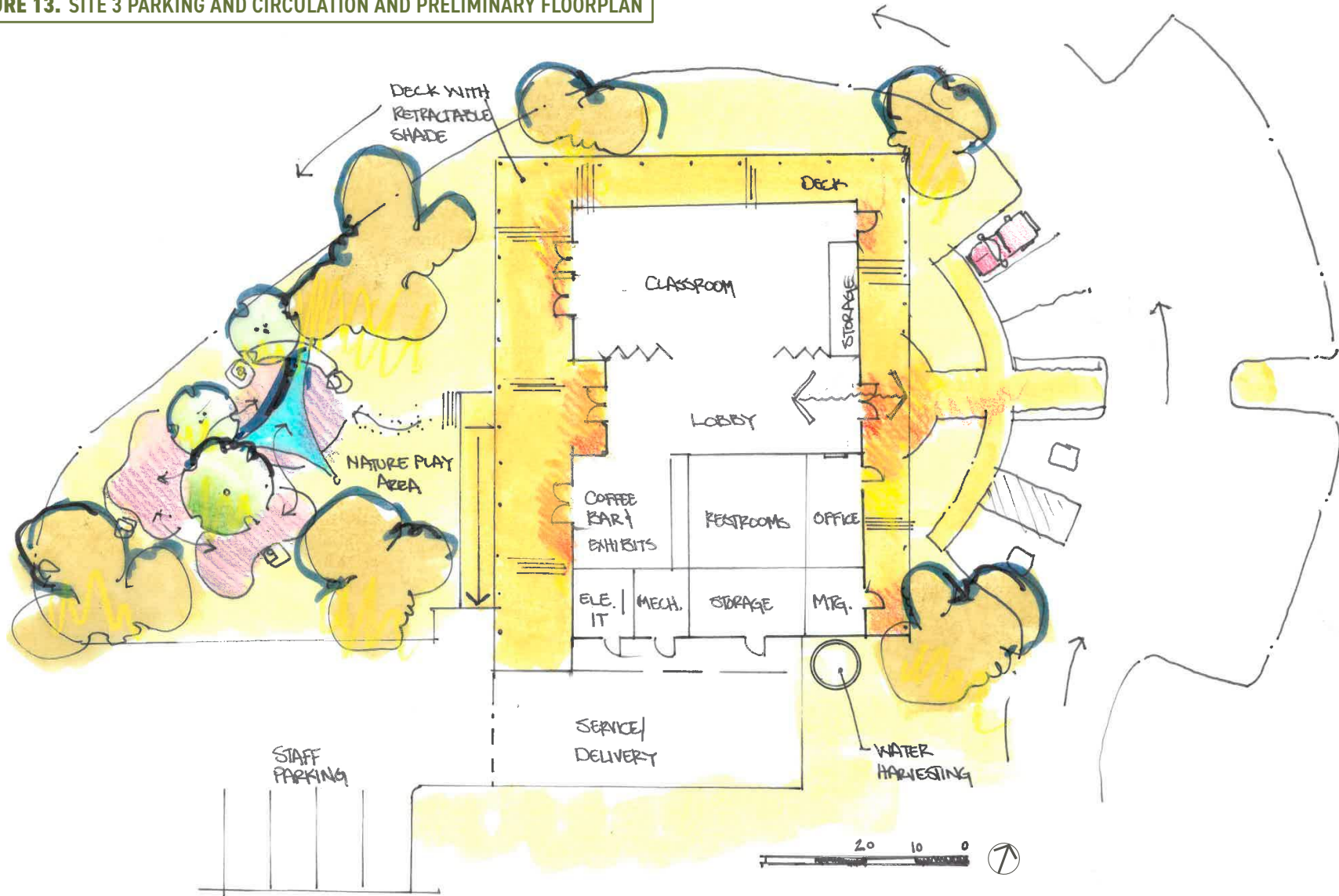


FIGURE 14. SITE 1B PARKING AND CIRCULATION



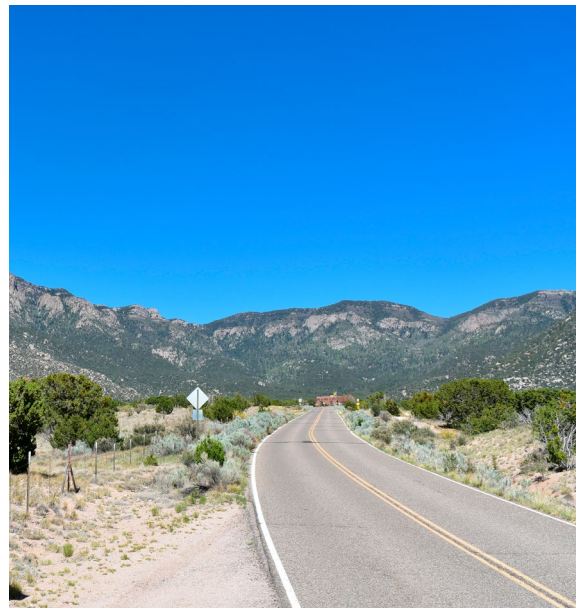
10. CONCLUSION

This feasibility study recommends locating a 6,000 to 8,000 square foot education center at either Site 1B - Cottonwood Springs or Site 3 - Inner Loop Rd. These locations provide the best vehicular access and circulation using the existing infrastructure and the least disturbance to the surrounding landscape. These locations are also near existing trailheads and parking. It is recommended to make improvements to Simms Park Rd, as this road will have an increase in traffic with the addition of an education center. Providing better bike and pedestrian infrastructure is key to providing equitable access to users. In addition, a satellite parking lot is recommended to be located at the northeast corner of Tramway Blvd and Simms Park Rd with a shuttle bus service during weekends and holidays. These improvements are meant to increase multi-modal access to Elena Gallegos Open Space in order to reduce additional parking needed for an education center.

Through a collaborative and iterative process with Open Space Division staff and the Advisory Committee, a preliminary floorplan and concept rendering was created that illustrates an initial program, layout, size, and site orientation of an education center. Spaces include a lobby, classroom, interpretive room and coffee bar, restrooms, staff offices and meeting room, and storage and utility areas. The building is situated on the site so as to take the most advantage of the views across Albuquerque and to the surrounding mountains. The classroom, lobby, and interpretive room and coffee bar spill over to a large deck that showcases these

views. In addition, a nature play area for children is provided for youth to interact with natural elements of the landscape in an unstructured yet safe manner.

The City of Albuquerque has more open space per capita than any other city in the country. The open space network in the Foothills of the Sandia Mountains includes some of the most dramatic and popular open spaces in the City, attracting over 150,000 visitors every year. Creating more educational opportunities for the public within the Foothills area is a natural next step towards enriching the open space experience and inspiring future generations to continue to care for these beautiful places.



Simms Park Rd with a view to the park attendant booth



Sunset looking west towards Mount Taylor



Double Shelter Picnic Area and Amphitheater signage

[THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY]