



The Sunshine Mile Overlay District: A Cooperative Effort Between Rio Nuevo and City of Tucson

Fletcher McCusker and Keri Silvyn • published in the March 2022 issue

The Broadway widening is taking shape. As you drive the widened street you can see how close the new roadway comes to the adjacent properties, and specifically those properties Rio Nuevo acquired from the City of Tucson (“City”) and the Regional Transportation Authority (“RTA”). Rio Nuevo will own about 45 parcels along Broadway that were at risk of demolition due to the widening. Rio Nuevo’s goal is to partner with private developers to activate these parcels/entire blocks for restaurant and retail space.



Solot Plaza

What Rio Nuevo discovered upon exploring ownership of these parcels and potential for redevelopment is that the City’s zoning code was not structured to encourage this new urban form along Broadway. It turns out that many other privately-owned properties along Broadway were going to face the same issue—the road was now closer than the City code permits, the properties would be substandard for parking, setbacks and other requirements. Although the City code would grandfather those existing uses, the City code did NOT encourage adaptive reuse or even new development unless the suburban City code requirements could be met on truly substandard parcels that remained after the widening.

Enter the Sunshine Mile Overlay District!! Rio Nuevo and the City, along with Project Manager Michael Becherer from Swaim Associates, Keri Silvyn and Robin Large at Lazarus & Silvyn, PC and Projects for Public Spaces all worked together to engage the community over 2.5 years to vision the Broadway corridor and adopt an optional overlay district—Sunshine Mile Overlay District (“Overlay”)—that balances historic preservation and urban



Sunshine Mile Overlay District



Moving the Bungalows



Rendering of the Bungalow Block

design/community involvement to provide an alternative option to property owners along Broadway from Euclid to Country Club for reinvesting in the community. The Overlay provides parking remedies where the widening aggravated available parking and encourages multi-modal and integrated affordable housing developments with allowable infill density. The Sunshine Mile Overlay District was adopted by the Mayor and City Council in September 2021.

So now, back to Rio Nuevo's projects (which can now move forward with the adoption of the Overlay).

City of Gastronomy Collective The first project of scale is called The City of Gastronomy Collective, awarded to local developers Randi Dorman and Moniqua Lane, who envision seven historic bungalows restored and activated to celebrate Tucson's UNESCO designation as a City of Gastronomy.

The seven bungalows between Cherry and Warren were picked up and moved north out of the roadway to save them. Rio Nuevo solicited competitive proposals to activate any or all the bungalows and the winning proposal, for the whole block, was submitted by Randi and Moniqua. Plans for the Collective were recently highlighted by Forbes magazine: "The Residency" is a rotating chef restaurant concept that will have culinary

professionals from other UNESCO Cities of Gastronomy doing some locally sourced kitchen experimentation. It will be based within the central bungalow and start off by featuring Tucson chefs. "We want the chefs to be able to flex their culinary muscles and take our heritage ingredients and use them in new and exciting ways," noted Dorman. "The Residency" will be connected to an adjacent bungalow bar, known as The Regional Bar, via an indoor/outdoor space. A new-build teaching and commercial kitchen will also be used as a studio and commercial commissary. Here, chefs, local purveyors and business owners can develop original video content as a means of food-related storytelling." ([Forbes, January 12, 2022](#))

The block, hoping to open in 2023, will feature several restaurants, with outdoor seating in the rear and adjacent parking on the former Maderas Gallery lot.

Zemam's Other restaurant activity is taking place further east at Treat where Rio Nuevo has partnered with Zemam's, the very popular Ethiopian restaurant, to acquire the three properties to the west and open an indoor/outdoor African-themed bazaar. Zemam's proper will expand the interior seating at the corner restaurant, open an indoor bar, outdoor café, VIP dining and share the outdoor space with selected kiosk vendors encouraging the African theme.

Rocco's, Lerua's and Welcome Tucson project

Just a couple doors down Rio Nuevo is working to relocate Rocco's to the Solot Plaza and will activate the Friedman Block with the renovation and reopening of Lerua's. At the west end Rio Nuevo has partnered with Sloan McFarland, the owner of Welcome Diner, to acquire the former Volvo site and expand that entire block with additional restaurant, hotel, and residential development.



Bungalow Block Interior

We have begun to see private restaurant development, hotel interest and expect to see multi-family interest once developers understand and appreciate the changes coming to Broadway.

This is the pattern Rio Nuevo followed downtown, opening food and beverage, creating reasons to patronize new establishments, soliciting hotel and apartment developers that embrace the opportunity to build rental units for urban dwellers.

For more information about the Overlay, whether it applies to your property along Broadway and how it might help if you are interested in reinvesting in your property along Broadway between Euclid and Country Club, you can access the complete document [here](#) or contact María Gayosso at maria.gayosso@tucsonaz.gov/(520) 837-4972.

Fletcher McCusker is the current Chairman of the Rio Nuevo Board. He is widely known as downtown Tucson's greatest fan and has traveled extensively visiting other revitalized or revitalizing urban environments, sharing ideas with a number of organizations. He is credited as one of the private sector leaders that has "skin in the game" and is determined to celebrate a vibrant, world class downtown. He can be reached at fjmccusker@gmail.com.

Keri Silvyn has been practicing zoning and land use law in Southern Arizona for almost 20 years. Her practice emphasizes sustainable development and appropriate and responsible growth. Her work focuses on advising private developers and local governments on application of zoning codes, compliance with state statutes, compliance with current land use case law, and effective public/private partnerships. Keri can be reached at ksilvyn@lslawaz.com.

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