



City of El Reno Community Development

P.O. Box 700, 73036
(405) 262-2000

2021 Community Economic Resiliency Initiative Application Summary

Community Category:

Mid-Size City – Population 5,000-20,000

City: The City of El Reno

Date: 3/12/2021

City Manager: Matt Sandidge, AICP

Phone: (405) 262-4070

Primary Contact: Dustin A. Downey, AICP

Phone: (405) 295-9317

Contact Title: City Planner

Email: ddowney@cityofelreno.com

Mailing Address: P.O. Drawer 700, El Reno, OK 73036

Name and Location of Proposed Planning Demonstration Site: Route 66 / Sunset Drive Corridor

The proposed planning demonstration would be a corridor study of Route 66 as it travels west from Historic Downtown El Reno to S. Country Club Rd. This mile section of Route 66 contains several existing buildings, signs, and sign frames which are iconic of the high-point of the Route 66 craze, and several undeveloped or underdeveloped sites which, when developed, will add to the authenticity and practicality of Route 66 cultural heritage tourism in El Reno, Oklahoma. Thousands of people travel this stretch of road annually as a portion of their trip down Route 66; some our neighbors here in town, others from all corners of the world. In the *Route to the Future* Comprehensive Plan, "The Sunset Strip" article describes 9 recommendations concerning this corridor, and recommends further study for the best possible future development. The City of El Reno is working with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation to provide new accessible sidewalks along this entire corridor, which should be installed in the next 18 months.

Local Assurance and Authorization

As the representative of the City of El Reno, I hereby certify that the information in this Application is accurate. I also authorize this application to be submitted to the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG), in consideration for ACOG's collaborative Community Economic Resiliency Initiative (CERI) with the Oklahoma Main Street Center (Oklahoma Department of Commerce) and the University of Oklahoma's Institute for Quality Communities (IQC).

Matt Sandidge

Name and Title of Authorizing Official

[Signature]

Signature

3/12/21

Date

Subscribed and Affirmed before me this 12 day of March, 2021.

Katie Gore

Notary Public

10/9/24

My Commission Expires



Commission No. 08010516

Planning Demonstration Site Area

Narrative Description

This site follows Historic Route 66 (Sunset Drive) from Choctaw Avenue west to Country Club Road, and includes the buildings, signs, parcels, and parks directly surrounding it. Lining Sunset in this area are 23 businesses, 63

houses, two churches, and a duplex. The Historic Rock Island Railroad bisects Sunset just west of downtown, and the Canadian County Historical Museum and historic Southern Hotel, which is now the Intrada El Reno Apartments, are just a block away.

Parks, plazas, and recreation areas bookend the proposed study area. Petree Plaza and the sites of the historic caboose and new Route 66 monument are located to the east as you enter Historic Downtown El Reno from this stretch of Route 66. Adams Park is located on the west edge of this corridor. Adams Park includes El Reno's Memorial Stadium and is adjacent to Lake El Reno and the Crimson Creek Golf Course, making the Adams Park / Lake El Reno / Crimson Creek Golf Course area the largest recreation area in El Reno and one of the largest in the region.

Over 20 sites are undeveloped or underdeveloped, with either vacant land, empty buildings, or personal shop buildings providing opportunities for future growth. All of these properties are privately held. The proposed planning study, coupled with implementing ordinance changes and other improvements based on the results of the project, and the walking infrastructure upgrades already scheduled, should incentivize development to meet the goals of the project, and the updated ACOG CEDS goals.

Site Maps on Following Pages

Route 66 / Sunset Drive
Corridor Study Project Area
CERI Application Mar. 2021

Legend

- Project Area
- Parks

SUNSET DR

W WATTS ST

S COUNTRY CLUB RD

N GRAND AVE

N CHOCTAW AVE

0 0.02 0.04 0.08 0.12 0.16 Miles

Source: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Route 66 / Sunset Drive
Corridor Study Project Area
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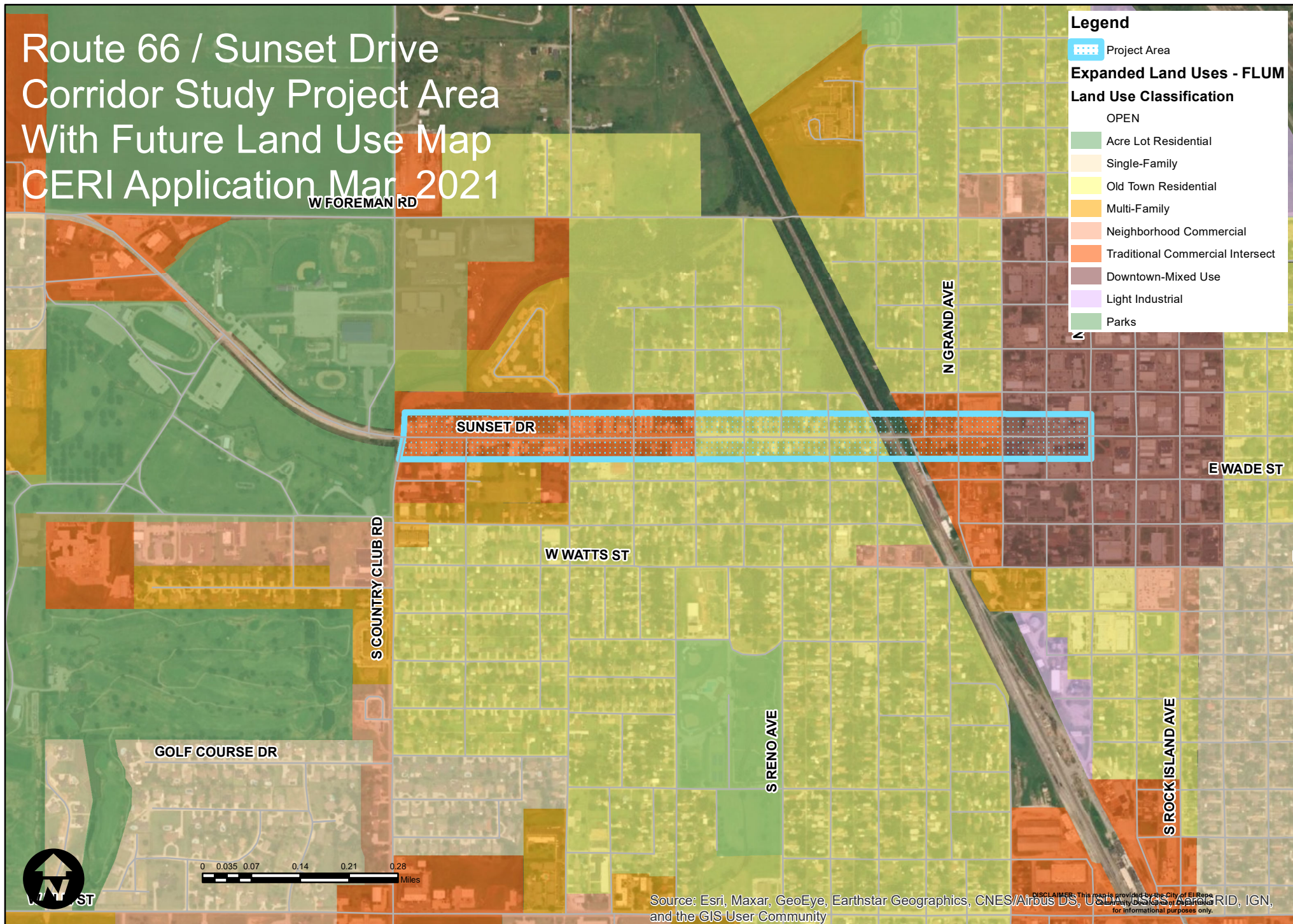
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Route 66 / Sunset Drive Corridor Study Project Area With Future Land Use Map CERI Application Mar 2021



Issue Statement

Why should your Activity Center be selected as a planning demonstration site?

Over 88% of survey respondents in 2019 agreed that Route 66 is an important part of El Reno's story. In our Historic Downtown, and extending along the project site, El Reno has significant cultural resources, existing spaces, and potential development areas. Planned and executed correctly, growth in this area can boost not only our cultural heritage tourism economy, but the quality of life for our residents. One of the core goals of the CERI project is to promote resiliency. Resiliency in El Reno is the understanding that chains and highway businesses will ebb and flow with the economy; but small business growth along Route 66 creates family businesses that grow with our community in this place.

The proposed Route 66 / Sunset Drive planning demonstration proposal is uniquely positioned in our area to create a regional destination, while building local commerce and a third place for El Reno residents today and in the future. This planning demonstration gives El Reno a chance to tell its Route 66 story, and add a new chapter.

Is your proposed project a game-changer for your community? If so, please explain how the implementation of this initiative will transform the economic prosperity and quality of life for your citizens.

Yes, this project is a game-changer. While the most visible assets of this corridor are the businesses lining Sunset on each side, the surrounding blocks contain hundreds of households, including the Woodson Park Apartments and Intrada Apartments among the over 400 residential units within two blocks of the Sunset corridor. The north side of Sunset, east of the railroad tracks, is the entrance into the Northwest Community, which is a historically marginalized neighborhood. The neighborhoods surrounding Sunset Drive have the highest walking rates in El Reno, and area census tracts have the lowest Median Household Incomes of our community. A new Dollar General store was constructed on Sunset in 2019, and it has extremely high foot traffic. The Lord's Harvest, a local resource for the food insecure, is located on this stretch of Route 66.

We have the unique opportunity to match one of our greatest opportunities for investment with a great area of need. With this investment in planning, and the subsequent municipal and private improvements, we have the ability to provide jobs to this area and improve aesthetics for those who travel this path, whether that be daily on their way to work or the store or on their vacation. Accessible sidewalks, which are in the 90% stage of design, and will be installed by ODOT by the end of 2022, will make a marked impact for residents who are sometimes relegated to using the street edge today. Any of these things individually would make an impact on residents' quality of life. Together, they are a game-changer.

Does your proposal, if fully implemented, have any regional significance?

This corridor is the most enduring stretch of Route 66 in El Reno. Investment in this area has the potential to have regional, national, and worldwide significance, because of the international appeal of the Mother Road. If fully implemented, this corridor could provide locals from El Reno and surrounding communities with more options for quality dining, shopping, and play.

Explanation of major assets and problems within the Activity Center:

El Reno's historic downtown has dozens of multi-story buildings constructed in the 1890s through the 1910s, generally preserved in a way which has kept its character intact. Many of these buildings are occupied by offices, apartments, and boutique retail shops. The El Reno Chamber of Commerce actively attracts and promotes area business, and El Reno Main Street is activating building owners and prospective businesses to spend in the area and revitalize the buildings in downtown. El Reno Public Schools, the City of El Reno, and Canadian County all office here, and El Reno High School is the area's southern anchor.

Unfortunately, the biggest thing keeping Historic Downtown El Reno from being a third place destination is the lack of dining options. Three fried onion burger institutions and 3 Mexican restaurants dot the southern side of downtown. These places fill for lunch, and often for dinner, but do not offer a variety of restaurant options, and are all located in the less walkable areas than the downtown area's center.

Many buildings available for future dining, nightlife, and multi-family development in the downtown area will need renovations inside and outside the structure, including upgrades to fire protection and sprinkler systems. The fire code requirements have deterred many would-be entrepreneurs, and the City is working diligently to find a way to encourage business while ensuring that new businesses and their patrons are safe and code-compliant.

Describe past or present efforts by the public and private sector aimed at revitalizing the historic CBD.

Historic Downtown El Reno has been bolstered by incremental improvements over the past several years. A new Route 66 sign has proven to be a photo magnet for travelers along the Route 66 route. Benches, signage, and potted planters have all been added by the City to improve the aesthetics of the area. El Reno Main Street has worked with several buildings to add string lighting under canopies along the sidewalk paths through downtown, and the sidewalks along Highways 81 and 66 are part of ODOT's sidewalk renovation project for 2021 and 2022.

If your community is currently an active participant in the Main Street Program, please describe the level of involvement and activities of the city leadership, local volunteer steering group, and the role of the Main Street program coordinator.

El Reno Main Street and the City of El Reno work together in multiple ways. The most visible of these is the annual Burger Day celebration in Historic Downtown El Reno. While El Reno Main Street develops the program, books vendors, and does the majority of the on-the-ground planning, the City volunteers assistance in marketing the event, staffing security, blocking off streets, and the El Reno Fire Department creates the driving attraction, the world's largest fried onion hamburger.

What aspects of ACOG's Updated CEDS Goals are not being considered in El Reno's planning efforts? Why?

The one item missing from the Updated CEDS Goals is the transit portion of the Transit-Oriented Development goal. We are focused on making the Sunset Drive corridor walkable, but there is not a full transit system in El Reno at this time.

Does your community have any planning efforts or projects that incorporate aspects of the Updated CEDS goals?

Please see the Local Commitment section for a full description of the integration of aspects of the Updated CEDS goals in the *Route to the Future* Comprehensive Plan, and in our current capital projects.

Local Resources

The primary point of contact for the CERI program is Dustin Downey. Downey has held the City Planner position in El Reno for over three years. In that time, he has bolstered relationships with residents, community leaders, and partner organizations to build community engagement in the planning process. Downey served as the instigator of the Route to the Future 2040 Comprehensive Plan for El Reno, organized the citizen steering committee and all community outreach activities for the plan, and was the lead author of the project. Currently, Downey is working with an additional team of citizens and city staff to create a unified development code for El Reno. He is excited to work on the Route 66 / Sunset Drive Corridor project, if approved, and is committed to ensuring that as many El Reno residents and organizations are involved as possible.

Matt Sandidge is the City Manager of the City of El Reno. While his time in the City Manager position has been short so far, his experiences with the City date back to 2012 in three different roles. Sandidge is a native of the El Reno area, and has extensive connections with community partners. He is excited to work on this project as well in a more limited capacity.

Other members of staff, including public safety officials, the Fire Marshal, the Parks and Recreation Superintendent, and building inspectors, will be available as needed throughout the process for consultation and in the steering committee process.

Local Commitment

Route to the Future, El Reno's new comprehensive plan, discusses many of the Updated CEDS goals in detail, in its own words. Walkability and connectivity are the primary subjects of full articles in the document. Our commercial and industrial land use articles reference the changes in business over time, the effects of these changes on the built environment in El Reno, and what obstacles there are to reutilizing existing buildings for new uses. Several articles in *Route to the Future* discuss El Reno's need to adapt our code to changing times and changing needs, and make recommendations for future updates. Both Historic Downtown El Reno and the Route 66 / Sunset Drive Corridor – the subject area of this proposal – are depicted as cultural resources and the target locations for future placemaking focus. The comprehensive plan was the result of collaboration between partners from all across El Reno, and from over a dozen departments, agencies, and organizations, and the need to continue working together was highlighted in the plan's recommendations.

Our staff and elected officials have committed to these objectives. A working group has embarked on creating a new Unified Development Code for the community, which is predicated on being easy to read and understand, and making updates to zoning and subdivision regulations which facilitate quality development in the 2020s. Sidewalk projects, between the City and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, will add approximately 5 miles of ADA-accessible sidewalk in locations which had few or no sidewalks in the next 2 years. Our partners have joined up with us again on additional projects, including a Recreational Trail Program grant application to provide the first phase in a circuit trail around Lake El Reno, which will provide quality of life, public health, and tourism benefits in addition to encouraging physical activity in a way which generally meets social distancing requirements. One of the major goals of the Unified Development Code project currently going on is to ensure that our zoning codes allow businesses to adapt to today's needs.

The City of El Reno has received strong support for planning activities in the past from partner organizations and community representatives over the past several years, and this project is no exception. We have received a letter of support from the El Reno Chamber of Commerce concerning this project, and have received commitments from the Canadian County Historical Museum to volunteer their efforts in this project. Representatives from local religious leaders and the El Reno Tribune have pledged their support to this project. The letter of support from the El Reno Chamber of Commerce is attached in the appendices.

This community outpaces many of its neighbors in gaining involvement, engagement, and buy-in from our community members. The El Reno Tribune and Chamber of Commerce are an immense help in letting people know about what is going on in the community and how residents can get involved. More importantly, our citizen board members are neighbors to residents throughout El Reno, and actively share with social, educational, parenting, and religious connections to help get the word out to as many people as possible.

A copy of the Resolution authorizing the submission of this application is included in the appendices.

Local Capacity

Describe a project or elements of a plan that your community has implemented including staffing, funding, development of regulations, community support, and formal actions by the governing body.

In 2018, the Municipal Planning Commission committed to making sidewalks a priority in El Reno. Many of our primary routes did not have sidewalks, and new commercial building permits did not require sidewalk installation. In a matter of a couple months, the Commission and staff devised an ordinance requiring sidewalks in commercial districts, established a fee-in-lieu of sidewalks for new construction far away from the city's center, and drafted a Sidewalk Prioritization District, including specific priority routes for public development. In June 2019, during the development of the *Route to the Future* Comprehensive Plan, 100% of survey respondents stated they would support new sidewalk development in El Reno. Today, the fee-in-lieu of sidewalk funds are being paired with bond revenue to construct over 1.5 miles of sidewalk on the first two priority routes, and *Route to the Future* has made future walkability and connectivity goals even more aggressive.

Describe the community's financial investment history, including recent capital improvement projects, current bonding capacity, and other financial tools that have been utilized.

In the fall of 2020, City Council supported a sales tax based bond issue of \$10 Million, slated for public infrastructure and public safety improvements, including sidewalk additions and street network upgrades. The City has an active downtown TIF which has been utilized to leverage additional funding for construction of drainage improvements, sidewalk development, and the construction of tracks for El Reno's trolley. Over the past decade, El Reno has focused diligently on parks improvements, including an outstanding grant application for a nearly half-million dollar project to extend the Lake El Reno Trail. We are committed to completing that project in phases over the next several years. The City has leveraged our capital against CDBG funding for drainage improvements in the project area multiple times over the last 5 years, and the overall project is intended to be complete in 2022. El Reno's hotel / motel tax is earmarked for tourism and economic development, including the Route 66 Monument, continuing renovations at the Centre Theatre in Historic Downtown El Reno, and downtown beautification efforts, such as signage and landscaping. Our work with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation will bring the first roundabout on the Oklahoma highway system to El Reno with a project starting in 2023.

Is the community willing and capable of providing a financial and/or in-kind match to enhance the project scope, if agreeable by all participating parties, in order to effectuate a more comprehensive outcome?

The City of El Reno is more than willing to participate with an in-kind match of time, experience, and materials (if available to us). A financial match is negotiable.



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405-262-1188
www.elrenochamber.com
Facebook.com/elrenochamber

March 9, 2021

Dustin Downey, AICP
P.O. Drawer 700
El Reno, OK 73036

Dear Mr. Downey,

Thank you for the opportunity to partner with the City of El Reno on the Community Economic Resiliency Initiative (CERI) project to highlight Historic Route 66.

The El Reno Chamber of Commerce supports the City's efforts to revitalize the Sunset Drive/Route 66 Corridor extending west from our community's historic downtown. Placemaking, tourism, and walkable commercial destinations all lead to more opportunities for our existing member businesses, and for future community growth. When the City is awarded the CERI program proposal, the Chamber commits to being involved throughout the process, including the dedication of one staff member to serve on a community steering committee, and by using our existing communication network to encourage our members to be involved in the planning process.

The efforts of the City of El Reno to command this project are to be commended. With the support of valuable stakeholders working in concert with CERI, we will improve the quality of life for our community and our visitors.

Respectfully,

Karen Nance, Executive Director
El Reno Chamber of Commerce

CITY OF EL RENO RESOLUTION NO. 21-031

A RESOLUTION REQUESTING THAT THE ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA GOVERNMENTS (ACOG) CONSIDER THE SELECTION OF THE ROUTE 66 / SUNSET DRIVE CORRIDOR PLANNING PROJECT AS A PROJECT CANDIDATE FOR THE CERI PLANNING DEMONSTRATION SITE PROGRAM

Be it remembered that on the Ninth day of March, 2021 at a regular meeting of the City Council of El Reno, Oklahoma, the following resolution was presented, read, and adopted:

WHEREAS, the CARES Act Recovery Assistance grant funds have been made available to ACOG, through the EDA, to provide consultant planning services for municipalities in the ACOG region in partnership with the University of Oklahoma Institute for Quality Communities (IQC); and

WHEREAS, the City of El Reno has selected a project planning proposal described as follows: The creation of a Route 66 / Sunset Drive Corridor Plan, which furthers the objectives of the Route to the Future Comprehensive Plan by taking a more in-depth look at what options are available to capitalize on Route 66 tourism, improve area commerce, walkability, and resiliency, and preserve and enhance the historic significance of one of El Reno's most storied routes; and

WHEREAS, the preliminary estimate of the planning project is \$19,000.00; and

WHEREAS, the City agrees to provide extensive community engagement to make the project planning process a success and provide ongoing community support to ensure future project implementation and maintenance funding; and

WHEREAS, the City assures that no qualified person with a disability shall, solely by reasons of their disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity administered by the City; and

WHEREAS, the City further understands that acceptance of this resolution by the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) is not a commitment of being selected as a CERI Planning Demonstration Site, but only registers the City's interest and commitment in participating in the program application process.

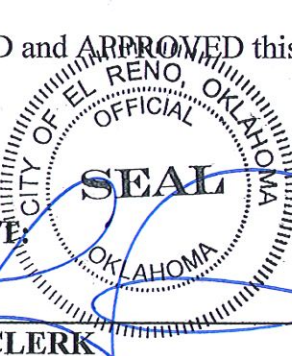
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of El Reno, Oklahoma that El Reno is requesting that ACOG consider the selection of this project as a candidate for the CERI Planning Demonstration Site Program, and to submit the completed project application to the CERI review committee for assessment and to the ACOG Board for final consideration.

PASSED and APPROVED this 9 day of March, 2021.

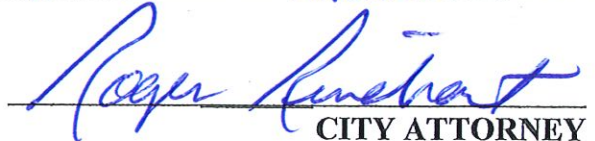

MAYOR

(SEAL)
ATTEST:

CITY CLERK



APPROVED AS TO LEGAL FORM THIS 11th DAY OF March, 2021.


CITY ATTORNEY

The Sunset Strip

America's Mother Road Fosters Tourism Economy

Driving west from historic downtown El Reno, the building pattern changes. Sunset Drive, El Reno's own piece of Route 66, contains sparkles of what the first wave of highway oriented commercial development looked like. Buildings with high and angled awnings, large non-rectangular signs, and wide driveways that morph into parking lots are sprinkled along Sunset Dr. between downtown and the El Reno Federal Correctional Institution.

"Route 66 is an important part of El Reno's story."

Over 88% of survey respondents strongly agreed with the sentence above.

Residents and visitors alike stated that Route 66 is an important part of El Reno's story. Travelers from across the world visit El Reno on Route 66, which

makes tourism a potential economic driver for the community. Businesses which cater to customers and potential tourists will encourage travelers to spend more time and money in El Reno on their passage across America. As they did during the height of Route 66, signs in unique shapes and bright neon alerted people of places to stay, eat, and shop along their journey. Today, several Route 66 destinations have used signage as an attraction, and locations like Oklahoma City's Automobile Alley have used small grants and regulations to encourage signage that ties districts together.

Sunset Drive is also where many community members come to get goods and services. The Dollar General and the Lord's Harvest, as well as other area schools, businesses, and churches, make this one of the most walked areas in El Reno. Sidewalks are prevalent in the area, but many do not have ramps at block ends, and are therefore not accessible for wheelchair users. The committee evaluated opportunities for this special planning district, and chose four that would potentially make the largest impact, while being responsible to the fiscal goals for El Reno's future. These are:





- Build a landmark feature at Adams Park that highlights the history of Route 66 and encourages passersby to stop and interact with the feature and the businesses on Route 66.
- Encourage renovation of historic structures
- Create a sign overlay district that would either encourage or require that new signage placed along the Route 66 corridor match the iconic character of old Route 66 signage.
- Improve Route 66 wayfinding with additional signage or small features.

At the Route to the Future Open Houses, participants were asked which two of these items they would like to see the most, and the most common responses were renovation of historic structures (shown on 82.1% of responses) and a landmark feature (61.6%).

Properties on either side of Sunset Drive are classified as Traditional Commercial Intersect, rather than Highway Commercial, on the Future Land Use Map. This means that the bulk, setback, and height requirements of the Automotive and Commercial Recreation (CAR) district may not be the best fit for this stretch of Route 66.

ABOVE: Travelers on Route 66 stop at the “El Reno 66” sign at Choctaw and Wade to show off their classic vehicles.

OPPOSITE PAGE: A Route 66 Gas Station on Sunset Dr., which still stands today. - Photo courtesy of Vicki Proctor

Recommendations:

- Work with state and local partners to attract developers to Sunset Drive.
- Include Sunset Drive in the El Reno CEDS.
- Improve sidewalk accessibility and continuity along Sunset Drive and adjoining neighborhoods.
- Facilitate Route 66 renovation projects by creating an easy-to-understand development chart that shows potential risks and requirements.
- Review zoning requirements of area parcels to ensure that the development allowed or encouraged by the zoning district is the correct development for the area.
- Implement a signage overlay to encourage or require new and existing businesses along Sunset Drive to use signage that highlights Route 66.
- Create a landmark or identifying feature at Adams Park, that distinguishes El Reno Route 66 from other locations on the mother road.
- Tie Adams Park to Route 66 with theming, make it a picture destination for travelers.
- Actively promote El Reno Route 66 Tourism, which will bring visitors, commerce, and revenue for the community.