

**March 30, 2023**

**TO: Councilor Isaac Benton**

**From: Kirtland Community Association**

**RE: Disparate Impact and Safety Risks in Assigning/Imposing VETERANS' INTEGRATION CENTER Project in the Kirtland Community/Neighborhood**



**Concern of the Kirtland Community Association: Is the System Truly Equal?**

Over the last 6 months, the issue of location and placement for a support services program for the Veterans' Integration Center (V.I.C.) has dominated discussions between representatives of the City of Albuquerque (C.o.A.), the Kirtland Community Association (K.C.A.) and the project Developer (Developer). Recognizing the need for said services for this at-risk population, and desiring to address with genuine compassion, the members of the Kirtland Community Association have expressed concern for the historic pattern, over 70 years, of being excluded from decision-making processes that impact our community, and which fail to address the needs identified for the residents therein. Because of the failed efforts to productively engage in discussion, alternative planning and/or resolution of this issue, we find it difficult, discouraging and disrespectful that the City of Albuquerque and its partner Developer have proceeded with plans to develop, locate and administer a property to address the needs of the designated service population for the Veterans' Integration Center. We believe it is important to consider similar past practices that have disregarded the recommendations of the Kirtland Association Communities' residents, without consideration for the impact of the City of Albuquerque's project planning on our children, our elders and the general health, safety and welfare of our citizenry at large.



## Background

In 2020, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham introduced the Council for Racial Justice, announcing, "...an advisory group tasked with counseling the administration and monitoring state institutions, holding them accountable for taking action to end systemic racism and ensure that all persons receive fair and equal treatment and opportunities..." (July 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, Press Release). In her statement, the Governor referenced an "overdue movement for racial justice" and drew attention to New Mexico's multicultural heritage and how it presents an opportunity to shape an, "...equitable future for all..." (July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020). When Mayor Tim Keller, Governor Michelle Lujan-Grisham and the City of Albuquerque Human Rights Board embraced a decree that recognized February 14<sup>th</sup> as 'Deconstructing Racism Day' in Albuquerque and New Mexico. Michelle Melendez, the Director of the City of Albuquerque's Office of Equity and Inclusion stated that, "...[W]e are coming to recognize that many policies and practices that appear to be 'race neutral' can have racially disparate outcomes." The City's Office of Equity and Inclusion was created under Mayor Tim Keller in 2017 when he was elected. With its creation came the claims, "...that addressing institutional racism is key to addressing these persistent inequalities...", "stated Melendez (Proclamations, Senate Bill and Testimony on Roundhouse Agenda for "Deconstructing Racism Day").

While the City has made multiple claims of their attempts to improve processes and procedures, their largest project, the Integrated Development Ordinance (I.D.O.) has proven to support the historic chains of systemic racism and redlining that exists in the City of Albuquerque within communities of color. The I.D.O. was written between 2015-2018

and, "...includes zoning and subdivision regulations to govern land use and development within the City of Albuquerque and establishes the City's system of planning (I.D.O.)." The idea behind the I.D.O. was to create a process that would be more equitable between business and communities and which would support the development of various, designated areas of the city. But, we question: Is it truly serving its intended/perceived function?

Prior to the I.D.O.'s creation, communities had an opportunity to state their concerns regarding projects that were proposed within their communities and to impact the overall decision of whether or not a development was approved or denied. In scrutinizing the current efforts presented to equal or 'level the playing field,' we find it necessary to question how the current planning and development process supports the claims that we are moving away from the systems of racism and towards a more equitable process, and reflect a more inclusive decision-making process, system-wide? We question how forcing projects on communities and presumptively imposing or assuming the needs of the community reflects an equitable process? Unfortunately, the progress the City has laid claim to is unrecognizable in the 648 page document that denies the voices of community members, creates impenetrable barriers and creates the illusion that communities have a fighting chance in the arena when the "deck is already stacked against them" before they even approach the podium for discussion.

Several communities have already fallen victim to the harsh realities of the City of Albuquerque's I.D.O., with the resulting issues and 'fallout' associated with the 'Homeless Epidemic' which is a problem across our city and state. The City's desire to take action within communities in the Southeast area(s) of the city have borne and continue to bear

the brunt of projects being enforced as a result of the “needs” perceived by individuals who are not residents of the areas they seek to invade. Projects include ‘The Gateway,’ located at San Mateo and Gibson, S.E., the Wellness Hotel located at Gibson and University, the attempted S.O.S. site at Mount Olive Baptist Church, the Project Share effort, formerly located on Yale; Thomas Bell Community Center, which served as a Homeless Shelter during the Height of the COVID pandemic, and the most recent project, the Veterans’ Integration Center, which is now being inserted into the Kirtland Community over the adamant objections of the neighborhood’s residents.

The Kirtland Addition, located in the Southeast Area of Albuquerque, is an historic community populated with a diverse population of long-term homeowners and family dwellings, with members including infants, children/youth, working adults and many retired, senior citizens, the elders of our community. The Community Association, itself, has been labeled “Small But Mighty” due to its persistence in fighting to elevate the voices of its community members over years, even decades of struggles with governmental bodies.

We’ve faced many battles and have sometimes even triumphed in the face of adversity. But, the challenges persist, as in the past, with efforts to impose decisions, projects, and more social issues with which our community must continually contend. Far too often, these are not believed to be beneficial to the majority of our community constituents. Though we support the Veterans’ Integration Center project, and its clients, recognizing the need to provide resources and housing to Veterans, we feel that the project will not benefit or enhance the health, wellness, safety and happiness of our community.

More specifically, we fear that this project and its target service population may well create undue risks for our children and elders.

We have expressed our concerns to the Veterans' Integration Center and to our elected officials regarding the concern(s) for the safety of the children in our neighborhood, additional traffic in and out of our neighborhood. It must be noted, with only one secure way in and out of the community, our day to day lives will be impacted with the influx of traffic, an issue that the city has not addressed after years of inquiry, and we believe our property values, for we are, indeed, homeowners in this community, will be adversely impacted by this development. This project will change our family sense of safety and security, and the influx of additional traffic will further exacerbate these concerns. We have already witnessed and verified the impact of the Wellness Hotel/Hawthorne, the rise in community crime in our neighborhood and the notable lack of response to our increased reporting of crime. We continue to question who will be responsible for any additional problems that arise as a result of the V.I.C.'s project that will include provision of mental and behavioral health services, plus a food pantry?

We acknowledge that the project is intended to bring amazing resources to Veterans. However, what value or enhancement will it bring to our community and our family residents? What provisions will be made to protect our residents from more potential risk(s)? What measures have been considered or will be committed to preserving and protecting our community's needs or wants, when our own concerns have been disregarded or no one has even asked us or shown evidence of any serious consideration for our expressed concerns? How problematic is it that representatives of the City, the Developer or even the V.I.C. can simply come in and declare, "The I.D.O. allows it!"

The I.D.O. allows an organization/business to decide they want to put a project on a piece of property and as long as it 'checks all of their boxes,' the impacted community has no right to contest it, even if their arguments and concerns are sound regarding the needs, wants, fears and benefits vs. risks of the target community.

How is a process that has predetermined the rights of the community regarded as equitable? How does the City or the State justify such, without benefit of representation of the very residents who will be directly impacted?

The I.D.O. provides an opportunity for a 'facilitated meeting' with a project developer which is to serve as an opportunity to find a "common ground" between the developer and the community. Our experience has shown that this meeting is screened and the only information that is recorded and documented are those questions and concerns related to the project (the Developer), but, without reflection or representation of concerns related to how the community feels or the overall impact of a new development, its presence or the concerns regarding the inequitable and non-representative process of the I.D.O. The experience of the Kirtland Community has been, even as we've attempted to address these concerns, preliminarily, (referencing our experience with the planning and development process), we have consistently been discouraged by the roadblocks at every step of the way, including efforts in locating information regarding the claims to ground breaking, permits submitted and press releases. We've questioned the process every step of the way and can't help but wonder why our community continues to be presented with these opportunities to "settle" including the premature presentation of a *Good Neighbor Agreement*.

Historically, our community has had to wait for requested resources and support as documented with the restructuring of the Thomas Bell Community Center, the request for increased Police Presence, the lighting addition(s) at University and Gibson, etc. However, for a “resource” that we did not ask for, the City has been quick to ‘help’ push the process through so another entity can dwell among us, in our neighborhood.

We once again sincerely and respectfully challenge the City and the State to reassess their claims of ‘creating systems of equity’ when our neighborhood—the place of our homes, our family, our centers of safety, security and well-being -- continue to serve as a dumping ground for projects that are unwanted by we who have invested our lives and our livelihoods, our families and our family legacies. This is our home. Will our desires and identified needs for our own safety and well-being be considered?

### **References:**

July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 Press Release: Governor Announces Council for Racial Justice.

<https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2020/07/31/governor-announces-council-for-racial-justice/>

City, State and Community Leaders Align to Tackle Institutional Racism

<https://www.cabq.gov/office-of-equity-inclusion/news/city-state-and-community-leaders-align-to-tackle-institutional-racism>

Albuquerque’s Racist History Haunts its Housing Market March 15, 2021

<https://www.hcn.org/issues/53.4/south-race-racism-albuquerques-racist-history-haunts-housing-market>

Repealing “ The neighborhood association recognition ordinance”

<https://cabq.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5530704&GUID=34237EA1-4CE6-4183-87D1-18ED9ACFD328&Options=ID|Text|&Search=neighborhood+recognition>

Kirtland Community Association

## Integrated Development Ordinance

[https://documents.cabq.gov/planning/IDO/2021\\_IDO\\_AnnualUpdate/IDO-2021AnnualUpdate-2022-12-25-Effective.pdf](https://documents.cabq.gov/planning/IDO/2021_IDO_AnnualUpdate/IDO-2021AnnualUpdate-2022-12-25-Effective.pdf)

<https://www.cabq.gov/planning/codes-policies-regulations/integrated-development-ordinance-1/integrated-development-ordinance>

For questions or additional information, please contact:

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