

# WESTSIDE STRATEGIC AREA STUDY



## Madonna Neighborhood Center and Gardendale Elementary Area | At-a-Glance Summary

### PROJECT OVERVIEW



**The Madonna Neighborhood Center and Gardendale Elementary Strategic Area Study** focused on an area along Dahlgreen Avenue south of Castroville Road that includes the Madonna Neighborhood Center, Gardendale Elementary and Pre-K 4 SA, and the St. Martin de Porres Parish. The concepts and recommendations build upon a foundation of previous campus investments and coordination by the Edgewood Independent School District and Pre-K 4 SA as well as existing cooperative agreements between Gardendale Elementary and St. Martin de Porres Parish. The Madonna Neighborhood Center has been engaged in a capital campaign to support planned new facilities. Community stakeholders from the Westwood Square Neighborhood Association and the Archdiocese of San Antonio were integral to the process, helping to reaffirm previous objectives and suggesting new ones. The process included an evaluation of community and public assets in each area; multiple stakeholder interviews and discussions; and three Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings, all resulting in the identification of needs and opportunities as well as recommendations for facility, street, and public space improvements that may be candidates for the 2022 Bond Program. In addition, the study sought to establish an approach among the community-serving entities and organizations for more coordinated community service provision and use of shared spaces and resources.

The Madonna Neighborhood Center and Gardendale Elementary Area community members and stakeholders expressed a vision for a cohesive community hub that

is safe and easy to access from all directions. Healthy foods, gardening, connections with nature, and multi-generational opportunities emerged as guiding principles that informed the ultimate design. The community envisions an area that supports and enriches everyone in the community, from young children to seniors. Investments will be directed toward the creation of shared spaces creating a unified design that allows everyone to move safely to and within the site regardless of age or physical ability. The local entities that provide educational, religious, and community support and services will further enhance their coordination, collaboration, and sharing of resources to better serve the evolving needs of area residents.

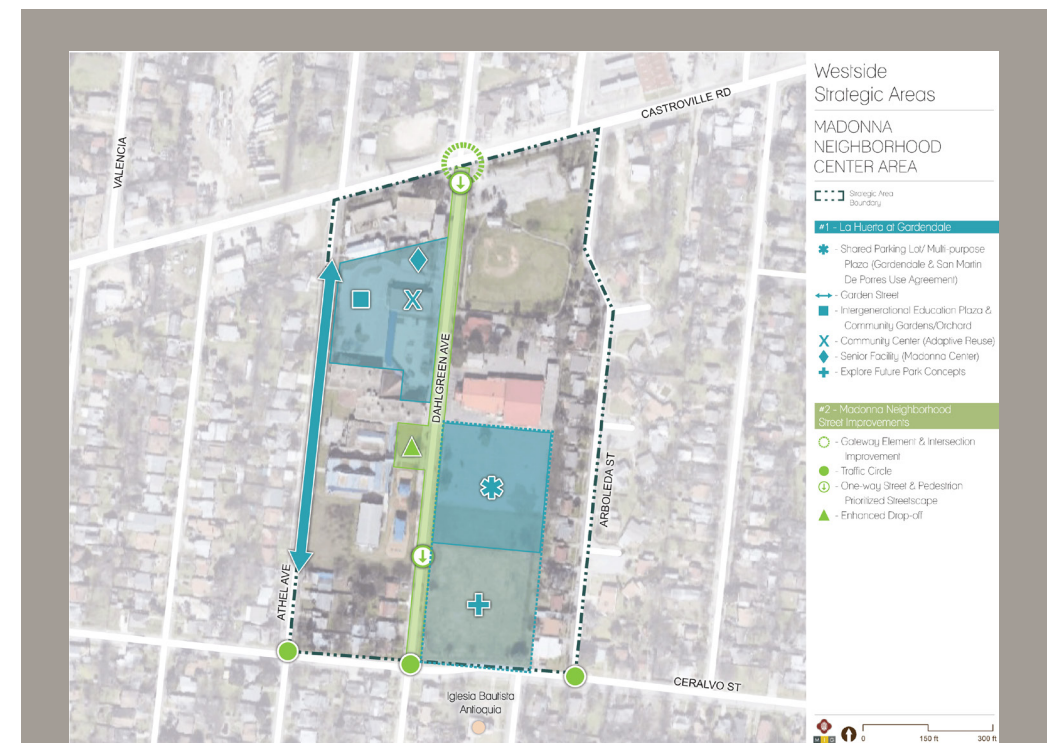
The concepts and recommendations outlined in this report reflect these goals and provide insight into the design intent and objectives of the community. Everyone understood throughout the process that a more detailed public input, design, and engineering process will occur if this project is approved and funded in the 2022 Bond Program.

For more detailed descriptions and full-sized images, please see the full project report available by scanning the QR Code below and/or by visiting the link to the right.



City Council District 5 secured funding in the Fiscal Year 2019 Budget for focused studies of three strategic community hubs on the Westside of San Antonio. The goal of the studies was to enhance community appeal and connectivity, and to identify and implement investments and programs that will help create a unified sense of place in each area. The three community hubs include:

- The Madonna Neighborhood Center and Gardendale Elementary Area;
- The Las Palmas Area; and
- The Good Samaritan Center/Cassiano Homes Apartments Area.



### CONCEPT OVERVIEW AND DESIGN INTENT

The design concept for the Madonna Neighborhood Center and Gardendale Elementary Area creates a unified campus-like feel and seamlessly connects community serving entities along Dahlgreen Avenue. For the purposes of being considered for the 2022 Bond Program as currently structured, the recommended improvements are grouped to align with typical Bond propositions such as Streets and Community Facilities. Although each category of improvements reflects important community objectives and can stand alone, the design intent and recommendation of the community stakeholders is that a comprehensive and holistic approach is taken to ensure each of these mutually supportive concepts is integrated into the final investment and design. Each category is briefly described below. For more detailed descriptions and full-sized images, please see the full project report available at <https://www.sanantonio.gov/Planning/Resources#13357794-policies--special-studies>.



Intergenerational Education Plaza & Community Garden / Orchard - Aspirational Illustration



Open Air Cafetorium / Multi-Use Community Center

### La Huerta at Gardendale

The themes of gardening, healthy foods, connections to nature, and intergenerational interactions emerged early in the stakeholder conversations, and quickly became the main inspiration and organizing principle for the design of the area. Staff from the Metropolitan Health District and Madonna Neighborhood Center spoke passionately about their work with area residents of all ages related to gardening and healthy eating. The project that anchors the design is “La Huerta at Gardendale,” a publicly accessible plaza incorporating a variety of gardens, plantings, and trees that create opportunities for multigenerational interactions and shared experiences for all ages. The main area used to create La Huerta is the current Gardendale Elementary staff parking lot, necessitating a shared parking agreement with St. Martin de Porres Parish.

The Huerta at Gardendale also includes renovations of an unused school cafetorium building into a flexible community center available for a variety of classes, meetings, and events. Renovation work would be extensive to bring the building up to code and to successfully integrate it with the surrounding plaza.



Gardendale Elementary Improved Student Drop-off Area - Aspirational Illustration

### St. Martin de Porres Shared Parking and Vacant Lot

Gardendale Elementary and St. Martin de Porres Parish across Dahlgreen Avenue have an existing understanding that allows overflow school parking to utilize the church parking lot. Repurposing the school parking lot as the plaza and orchard will require a more formal shared parking agreement allowing teachers and staff to use the church parking during school hours. The parish also owns the large vacant lot south of its parking lot and is starting to explore ideas for how that could be used to benefit the church and surrounding community in the future.



Athel Avenue - Aspirational Illustration

### Athel Garden Street Design

The themes of safe multimodal access and community gardening both carry over into the proposed redesign of Athel street which runs north and south on the west side of the elementary school and the Madonna Neighborhood Center. Improvements range from simple lane striping to better define the street space, to a new multi-use path lined with street trees and planter boxes. The Athel Street design may also need to accommodate safe drop-off for Kindergarten through Second Grade students if COVID concerns continue and multiple entrances are required for the safety of students and school staff and faculty.



Castroville Road and Dahlgreen Avenue Intersection - Aspirational Illustration



Ceralvo Street - Aspirational Illustration

### Pedestrian Safety, Intersection Improvements, and Traffic Calming

Pedestrian safety was another consistent theme throughout the process, reflecting the daily arrival in the area of many parents, children, and seniors, in many cases by walking or biking. Slowing traffic to create a safer pedestrian experience was the main design principle for Dahlgreen Avenue. The street should be redesigned for north-south, one-way traffic at all times, with narrower traffic lanes, clear lines of sight, and highly visible crossing areas. A curbless, “woonerf”-style living street that prioritizes pedestrian movements is desired, but more detailed engineering and stormwater drainage studies must be completed to determine feasibility. The final design should slow traffic speeds and prioritize pedestrians along the length of Dahlgreen and at nearby intersections. An additional slip lane should be constructed to facilitate the safe drop-off of kids at Gardendale Elementary and Pre-K 4 SA.

The intersection at Dahlgreen Avenue and Castroville Road was also identified by the community as a place that needs improved pedestrian safety, as well as multiple intersections along Ceralvo Street to the South.

## CONCLUSION

Gardendale Elementary School, the Pre-K 4 SA Program, the Madonna Neighborhood Center, and St. Martin de Porres Parish are an important collection of social services and community amenities in a neighborhood that has often felt left behind and somewhat forgotten. This project represents the collective vision of community stakeholders for how those individual entities can have even greater social impact and positive influence

on area residents. The creation and use of shared public spaces that enrich, beautify, and provide opportunity for the community will further deepen collaboration between these valued institutions and enhance their ability to support, inspire, educate, and increase the well-being of constituents in their neighborhood and beyond.

Please note: illustrations and example photographs included throughout this document are meant to convey design intent and provide examples of how the recommended concepts and features might look. Future community input, design, and engineering processes should use them as a starting point for guiding their conversations, but final details could certainly vary from exactly what is shown here within.