



# WESTSIDE STRATEGIC AREA STUDY



## Madonna Neighborhood Center and Gardendale Elementary Area



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO  
**PLANNING DEPARTMENT**

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## PROJECT OVERVIEW

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.

**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.

The next section provides an overview of the design concepts and objectives. Following that are sections with more detailed descriptions and accompanying conceptual illustrations of the various recommended improvement categories. The report concludes with a Project Improvements Table that lists each main recommended improvement, key partners, potential champions, and high-level cost estimates.





Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting [via Zoom]

Westside  
Strategic Areas  
Base Map

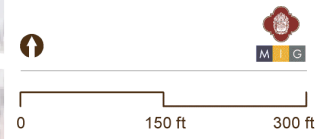
MADONNA  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
CENTER AREA

LEGEND

-  Park or Open Space
-  Strategic Area Boundary

Community Amenities

-  Neighborhood Center
-  Public School
-  Place of Worship
-  Community Garden



## 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, with more detail and conceptual illustrations provided in the sections that follow.

### 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 cafeteria 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.

### 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.

### 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 curbside, “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.

### 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.

*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.*





Intergenerational Education Plaza & Community Garden / Orchard - Aspirational Illustration



## LA HUERTA AT GARDENDALE

Two major investments would anchor La Huerta at Gardendale: the community plaza with gardens and a small orchard; and the adaptive reuse of the old cafetorium building as a multi-use community center. Both will serve as important focal points of activity and connection for the community-serving entities along Dahlgreen Avenue and area residents.

### La Huerta

The plaza would be built over the existing staff parking lot located between Gardendale Elementary on the south and the Madonna Neighborhood Center on the north. The objective is to create an accessible and beautiful community space that physically links the two institutions and provides opportunities for intergenerational activities centered around gardens, orchards, healthy food, and community. The plaza area would also offer shade structures, various types of seating and gathering areas, and perhaps a small amphitheater type performance area. School District-approved fencing and secure gates will be needed around the plaza to ensure the safety of younger children while allowing community access during off-school hours.

The gardens would be maintained and used by school age children at the Elementary School, seniors from the Madonna Neighborhood Center, and other community members with an interest in supporting this community amenity. Participants in Community Center healthy food and cooking classes might also gain experience planting, growing, and harvesting their own vegetables for healthy meals. Local college horticulture programs could also be enlisted to help maintain the tree orchard and other plantings as part of classwork or gaining practical experience in the field.



Curbsless Pedestrian Focus Street



Elementary School Orchard



Open Air Cafetorium / Multi-Use Community Center



Closer to Dahlgreen Avenue, the current drop-off lane would also be converted into public space featuring more trees, shade structures, and perhaps a fountain, enlivening one of the pick-up/drop-off areas at the school as well as the space immediately outside the cafetorium building. Several off-street parallel parking spaces along this stretch of Dahlgreen Avenue would provide easy access to the plaza and cafetorium. Two hardscape areas could be used for food trucks or other event set-ups.

### **Multi-use Community Center**

The former cafetorium building belonging to Edgewood Independent School District requires substantial renovation and updates to meet current building codes. Investing in such renovations through the Bond Program would create a much-needed multi-purpose community center for the area. Similar to the plaza, the goal of the community stakeholders is for the space to be built with flexibility and multiple uses and users in mind so that it becomes a vibrant meeting, class, and activity space valued by the surrounding community. Uses could range from community meetings, healthy eating and gardening classes, childcare, adult literacy and financial literacy courses, and art programs, among many more. Roll-up garage doors would allow the space to open up to the plaza and to the spaces on either side, facing the school as well as the new senior building being built on the Madonna Neighborhood Center Campus.



Safe Campus Paths for Students

### **Recommended Design**

#### **Features:**

- Roll-up garage doors / operable exterior wall adjacent to plaza
- Flexible outdoor seating
- Open format, programmable interior to facilitate meetings, large gatherings and events
- Fixed learning stations for classroom use

## Landscaped, Permeable, and Programmable Parking Lot

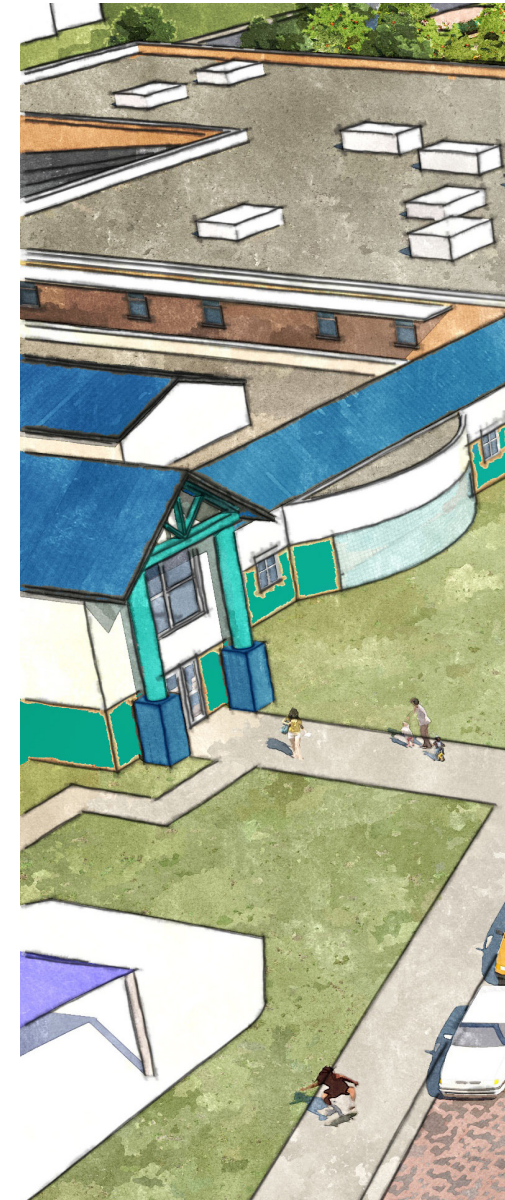


### SAINT MARTIN DE PORRES SHARED PARKING AND VACANT LOT

The creation of La Huerta in the space previously used as staff parking for the Elementary School necessitates a more formal shared parking agreement between the school and St. Martin de Porres Parish directly across Dahlgreen Avenue. This agreement would build on a current ongoing understanding of allowing school use of the church's parking lot for overflow needs. The more formal agreement on shared parking would allow School staff, parents, and visitors to use designated sections of the church's parking lot on school days, preserving full use by the church on Sundays. Because the church sometimes hosts funerals and other events on weekdays, the lot would need to be expanded to accommodate church visitors as well as school parking needs on those occasions.

Both Edgewood Independent School District and the Archdiocese of San Antonio agree upon this arrangement in principle; details and a parking needs assessment will need to be conducted in the future to determine the final scope of the parking lot expansion project. In addition to expansion, the parking lot should be improved with green infrastructure for better natural drainage, trees for shade and beautification, and infrastructure such as electrical outlets to allow the lot to more easily host church and community events and festivals. Clear walking paths, improved lighting, and wayfinding signage are also desired.

Finally, several ideas for improving the church-owned vacant parcel south of the parking lot were introduced late in the process during conversations with the community on site design. These ideas have not been vetted and refined to the same degree as others in this report but are included so that they may be explored in more detail should this area receive funding in the Bond Program. Early suggestions centered around using the lot to create a small neighborhood park that might include a walking trail, shaded seating area, and native plantings that match the style of the green infrastructure improvements in the parking lot.





- A- Redesigned Drop-off Area
- B- Improved Crosswalks
- C- Street Lighting
- D- Curbless One-Way Street
- E- Shared Parking Lot
- F- Increased Vegetation

Gardendale Elementary Improved Student Drop-off Area - Aspirational Illustration



EXISTING CONDITIONS



Castroville Road and Dahlgreen Avenue Intersection - Aspirational Illustration



Unique Crosswalk Design



Pedestrian Bridge Artwork



## PEDESTRIAN SAFETY, INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS, AND TRAFFIC CALMING

Pedestrian safety is a major theme for the design of the Madonna Neighborhood Center and Gardendale Elementary Area. The daily influx of parents, students, teachers, and visitors to the Madonna Center and St. Martin de Porres Parish will only increase as the area develops as a more vibrant community hub. Pedestrian safety improvements are focused on Dahlgreen Avenue, the intersection of Dahlgreen Avenue and Castroville Road, and several nearby intersections along Ceralvo Street.

### Dahlgreen Avenue Living Street

Dahlgreen Avenue is the spine of the area, connecting multiple community serving institutions and amenities. As such, it should be redesigned as a living street that prioritizes pedestrians by slowing car traffic, preserving good site lines, and creating highly visible and safe crossings with good signage and lighting. Community stakeholders agreed it is desirable to make Dahlgreen Avenue one-way, north to south at all times, rather than just during school pick-up and drop-off hours. This will allow the street to be narrowed and reconfigured to slow traffic and increase safety at crossings. A new drop-off lane should also be created in front of Gardendale Elementary across from the church parking lot (see the illustrations on pages 8 and 13). Additional pedestrian-oriented and pick-up/drop-off design may need to occur on Athel Avenue west of the school if Kindergarten through Second Grade students continue using that alternate entrance under COVID-related safety protocols.

### Castroville Road and Dahlgreen Avenue Intersection

Redesigning Dahlgreen Avenue as one-way has an additional benefit of increasing safety at its intersection with Castroville Road by eliminating dangerous left turn movements from Dahlgreen on to southwest-bound Castroville Road. This intersection will also benefit from improvements that increase driver visibility and awareness such as a gateway element across Dahlgreen Avenue, a colorful and highly visible crosswalk and intersection painting, and vibrant public art elements and signage to the pedestrian bridge over Castroville Road. Each of these improvements will draw the attention of drivers and alert them that they are entering an active space with high pedestrian activity.

## Ceralvo Street - Existing Conditions



### TRAFFIC CALMING ALONG CERALVO STREET

Area residents note that cars often exceed posted speed limits along Ceralvo Street near the school, potentially endangering parents, students, and others walking in the area. Combining this need for traffic calming and the prevailing theme of La Huerta, small traffic circles are proposed. These traffic circles will slow automobile traffic (without impeding school bus or emergency vehicle access) and provide opportunities for additional plantings or gardens to beautify the area. Improved signage and more visible crosswalks will further increase driver awareness and pedestrian safety. Although the traffic circles can be installed independently of any other work on these intersections, project design and construction teams should leverage the opportunity to install ADA-compliant sidewalk ramps and address area sidewalk gaps or those in poor condition. Collectively, these improvements will increase the safety and enjoyment of walking in the area.



Ceralvo Street - Aspirational Illustration





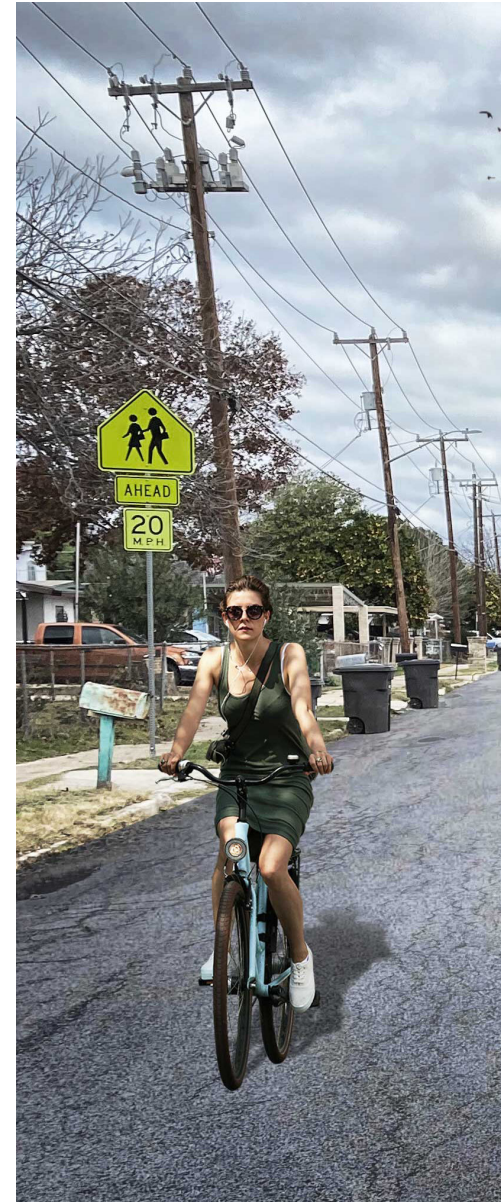
## Athel Avenue - Existing Conditions



### ATHEL GARDEN STREET DESIGN

Athel Avenue is another design concept that combines the main themes of pedestrian safety, connections to nature, and community gardening. Envisioned as an active garden street, Athel Avenue would have improved lane painting in the roadway itself, and multiple new street trees and planter boxes that will provide a visual and safety buffer for a new multi-use path. To facilitate this new path, the School District has indicated they could agree to an easement into their property on the back side of the school. This extra off-street space can be used to accommodate the street trees, planters, and the new, wider multi-use trail that would extend most of the length of Athel Avenue. If the project is funded by the Bond Program, further agreements would be necessary to ensure clarity on responsibility for irrigation of the trees and planters and for maintenance of the trail.

Athel Avenue would remain open for two-lane traffic, but one section of Athel Avenue may also need to be designed for safe student drop-off and pick-up if some current COVID safety protocols continue in the future, necessitating use of an alternative entrance on the west side of the school for Kindergarten through Second Grade students. A raised speed table in the drop off area, along with signage and a visible crossing is one approach to be explored.



Athel Avenue - Aspirational Illustration



## 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.

The design concept put forth by the community focuses both on safety around the edges and a strong, vibrant core. Investing in complete and green streets leading to and passing through the area will increase safety, encourage more active mobility, and help improve health outcomes if area residents feel more comfortable walking and biking to school, work, and other activities. The reimagining of Dahlgreen Avenue as a living street designed for people rather than cars helps set the tone for the entire area. While walking or driving slowly on that center spine of the area, it will be impossible not to notice the peace, beauty, and activity emanating from the plaza and La Huerta. Together with the new Community Center and new developments in the adjacent Madonna Neighborhood Center, La Huerta

at Gardendale forms a new core of activity and shared experiences for the community.

The focus on bringing together different generations in these spaces reflects the heritage of the surrounding community and speaks to the way they value family and the passing of collective wisdom and tradition through shared experiences. The passionate advocacy by stakeholders for gardens, fruit trees, healthy eating, and natural beauty also supports the vision for working together, across generations to support the health, self-sufficiency, and vibrancy of individuals, families, and the larger community.

When the stakeholders reviewed the final concepts, several remarked how excited they were to finally see attention and focus on their neighborhood, and that through this process they felt their community could be a model for how others can also improve. Collectively, all the improvements described in this report undoubtedly represent a significant investment, but it is one which is certainly on par with many other investments made in past Bond Programs, and it is in an area that has not seen investment commensurate with other parts of the City. In addition, while many other Bond projects are stand-alone, one-off projects, this unified set of projects demonstrates the value of bringing together passionate, committed stakeholders and design professionals to create a cohesive vision for an area that truly reflects the needs of area residents and offers design solutions and investments that achieve multiple, overlapping objectives.

The community stakeholders recognize that not every investment suggested in this concept design will be eligible for bond funding. However, it was important to include all the priorities, both big and small to faithfully express the depth and detail of their collective vision. It is hoped that additional funding sources, partnerships, and creative collaborations can be identified to fill the gaps and implement items that fall outside the strict parameters of the Bond Program funding mechanism.

The Project Improvement Table on the next page provides a simple summary of the major investments likely to be eligible for the Bond Program. It also includes key partners for collaboration, potential champions for both the Bond Program process itself as well as future community input and design processes, and high-level, planning cost estimates, which do not include soft costs. For inclusion into the formal Bond Program process, each item will need more detailed review and assessment by Public Works staff and/or their consultant team to derive more precise cost figures.

## PROJECT IMPROVEMENTS TABLE

IMPROVEMENT	ORDER OF MAGNITUDE COST ESTIMATE	KEY PARTNERS	POTENTIAL CHAMPIONS
<b>LA HUERTA AT GARDENDALE</b>			
EDUCATION PLAZA, COMMUNITY GARDENS AND ORCHARD	~\$2,900,000	Edgewood ISD, Gardendale Elementary, Madonna Neighborhood Center, Pre-K 4 SA	Westwood Square Neighborhood Association, Archdiocese of San Antonio, Parks and Recreation, Metro Health
CAFETORIUM ADAPTIVE REUSE INTO MULTI-USE COMMUNITY CENTER (LEVERAGE FUNDING FOR BUILDING RENOVATION)	~\$2,000,000	Edgewood ISD, Gardendale Elementary, Pre-K 4 SA	
<b>ST. MARTIN DE PORRES SHARED PARKING AND VACANT LOT</b>			
SHARED PARKING LOT / MULTI-PURPOSE PLAZA (INCLUDES PARKING LOT EXPANSION)	~\$500,000	St. Martin De Porres Church, Archdiocese of San Antonio, Gardendale Elementary, Pre-K 4 SA	Westwood Square Neighborhood Association
<b>PEDESTRIAN SAFETY, INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS, AND TRAFFIC CALMING</b>			
DAHLGREEN AVENUE (FULL RECONSTRUCTION, ENHANCED DROP-OFF)	~\$4,500,000	Public Works, Edgewood ISD, Gardendale Elementary	Westwood Square Neighborhood Association
CASTROVILLE ROAD AND DAHLGREEN AVENUE INTERSECTION (CURB RAMPS, STRIPING, MONUMENT SIGN, PUBLIC ART)	~\$200,000	Public Works	Edgewood ISD, Madonna Neighborhood Center, Westwood Square Neighborhood Association
TRAFFIC CALMING ALONG CERALVO STREET (LANDSCAPED MINI-TRAFFIC CIRCLES)	~\$100,000	Public Works	Westwood Square Neighborhood Association
<b>ATHEL GARDEN STREET DESIGN</b>			
MULTI-USE PATH, TREES & GARDEN BEDS	~\$1,500,000	Public Works, Gardendale Elementary, Pre-K 4 SA	Westwood Square Neighborhood Association



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