

## **Plaza de Las Cruces Shade Options Final Report**



Economic Development Department, Destination Downtown

July 2022

The Destination Downtown section of the Economic Development Department was tasked with reviewing additional options for shade on the Plaza de Las Cruces. Previous efforts included a feasibility study conducted by Vigil and Associates Architectural Group in early 2020 which explored various permanent structural options, none of which were approved by City Council.

For this attempt, Destination Downtown put together a committee of downtown stakeholders to look at new options. The committee members were:

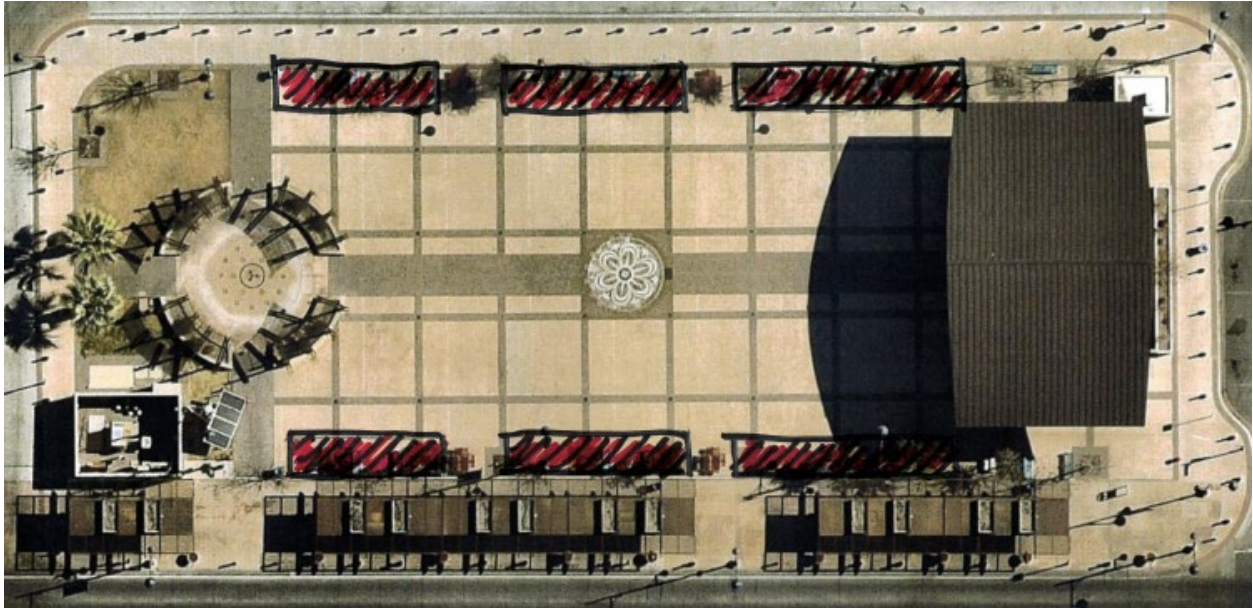
- Greg Smith, Executive Director, Doña Ana Arts Council
- Karen Bradshaw, Manager, Las Cruces Farmers and Crafts Market
- Russ Smith, Event organizer
- Robert Cruise, President, Downtown Las Cruces Partnership
- Richard Haas, Downtown business owner
- Holly Piasente, Event organizer
- Louie Gamon, Event organizer

## Issue to be Addressed

The committee reviewed the first feasibility study and discussed options that were not included in the previous plan. It was determined that the issue that needed to be addressed was providing shade options for the hottest months of the year (June, July, and August) at the times of day that most events were held (late afternoon and early evening). Temperature conditions on the plaza September – May were not of concern, and in fact, permanent shade could create colder than desired temperatures during winter months. Based on these criteria, the committee narrowed discussions down to two options: replacing existing plaza trees with tall mature trees or adding a 20-foot stand-alone vertical shade structure on the west side of the plaza.

## Option 1: Replacing Existing Plaza Trees with Mature Trees

The first option considered by the committee was to replace the existing trees on the east and west sides of the plaza with larger mature trees that can provide immediate shade and well as grow to provide additional shade over time. To accommodate the larger trees, this option would involve removing the existing trees and expanding the tree wells to about 10-12 feet wide, running the length of the plaza.



Additional work required for this option would include modifications to the irrigation and electrical systems. Bushes can be used to fill in spaces between the trees, and a low fence is recommended to keep people/pets from damaging the area.

This option would serve to correct soil issues impacting the current trees on the plaza. These conditions will persist and limit the life cycle of the current trees if not addressed. Replacing them with mature trees and performing the needed work to the soil allows this problem to be corrected. Already since the plaza was constructed, several trees have died or needed to be replaced.

Availability of tree inventory might be the largest issue regarding this option. The freeze that hit Texas and parts of the Southern United States a couple of winters ago, has created product shortages. Selection has decreased and costs have increased.

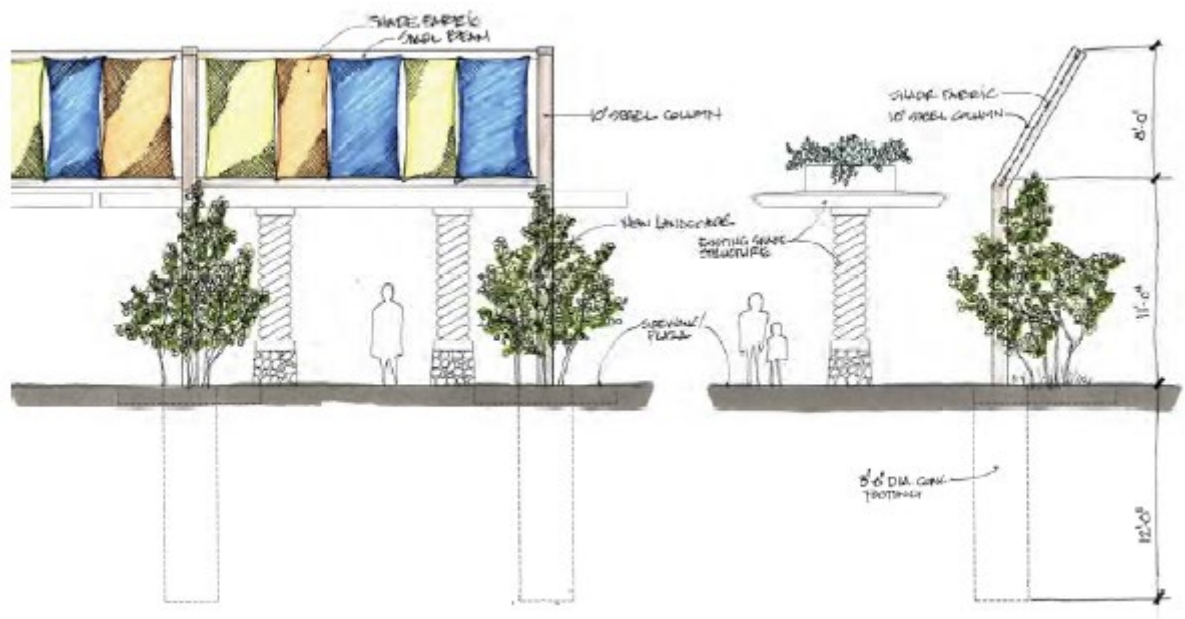
The cost for this option would be between \$200,000-\$400,000 depending on the cost of the trees.

## Option 2: Vertical Stand-Alone 20-foot Shade Structure on the West Side of the Plaza

The four shade options originally presented to City Council in fall of 2020 looked at permanent structures that provided shade via over-head options. These structures were permanent, conflicted with events traditionally held on the plaza, would impact sound distribution from the stage, and created large areas of shade that would not be ideal in winter and spring months. Prices (at that time) were between \$560,000 and \$1million. Today, costs are likely to be as much as 30-40% higher than original estimates.

This option would require trenching approximately 12 feet below the surface to accommodate the pillars needed to support the 20-foot tall structure. The elevated structure would run the length of the west side of the plaza and would block the sun primarily during the hottest times of the day – late afternoon. The shade panels are designed to be decorative and removeable.

An approximate cost for this option is \$500,000. Additionally, this would not address any of the soil issues plaguing the current trees on the plaza; trees will continue to have a limited life cycle.



## Committee Recommendation

After both options were considered, the committee overwhelmingly opted for replacing the current trees with tall mature trees. The committee felt this option addressed several areas of concern:

- Provides shade during the months/times of day that need it the most
- Resolves the soil issues impacting the trees currently on the plaza
- Does not provide year-round shade that could create cold conditions in winter and spring months
- Contributes more positively to the aesthetics of the plaza
- Adds more greenery to downtown which is primarily concrete and asphalt

While there is some unpredictability with this option, it does not close the door to future additions to the plaza and is more in line with the original aesthetic intent of the plaza.

The recommendation would be to include this project in the FY24 budget for funding in the amount of \$500,000 from the TIDD. Funds would be available in July 2023, with construction to begin in January/February 2024 so the plaza can be open for events in last spring 2024.