

DEVELOPING A RÍO PIEDRAS QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAM

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Río Piedras Quality of Life Program Vision:

A safe, clean, walkable, mixed income community that welcomes students, families and people of all ages to its thriving *barrios* that are strongly linked to an active commercial center. A Río Piedras well-connected to the larger San Juan community as a center of unique shopping, education and entertainment.

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Figure 1. Parroquia Nuestra Señora del Pilar, a centerpiece of Río Piedras

Acknowledgments

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From the LAI we thank the leadership of Leslie Pollock and the team members that contributed with their knowledge and expertise for the development of this much needed document: Jim Musbach, Mel Freeman and Cassandra Francis.



Figure 2. Community Members provide insight for the development of the plan

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INTRODUCTION

Lambda Alpha International (LAI) is an honorary society of land economics professionals who have distinguished themselves in the various disciplines and activities related to the use and re-use of land. Hailing from 24 LAI Chapters throughout the world, these architects, engineers, real estate developers, planners, government officials, professors, bankers, attorneys, academics and real estate consultants are involved in the ownership, management, regulation and conservation of land, as well as its development, redevelopment and preservation.

LAI chose San Juan, Puerto Rico for its semi-annual Land Economics Weekend (LEW) to learn about the latest land economic trends and ideas as practiced in Puerto Rico. The meeting was held May 1-4, 2019 at the Marriott Stellaris Resort. In keeping with the Society's mission, LAI has offered the resources of its members to assist the Río Piedras community, represented by the Río Piedras Development Trust (FDRP for its Spanish acronym) to identify strategic actions and projects to improve the community's overall quality of life, and to respond to problems and challenges further complicated by hurricanes Irma and María.

LAI, working with the FDRP embarked on a three-step process:

- 1.** Meeting with Río Piedras leadership to identify how best to use LAI resources for that purpose. This meeting was held in November 2018.
- 2.** Committing a delegation of three LAI members to be part of a week-long community improvement work session convened February 11-16, 2019, in conjunction with community volunteers. The work session resulted in a draft Quality of Life Program aimed at identifying key strategies and projects to address economic development, housing, infrastructure, health, public safety and social services problems within the community. (See Appendix 1)
- 3.** Presenting this community-based program to LAI members who constituted a Professional Advisory Delegation (PAD) that participated in an on-site workshop on May 1, 2019. The PAD Workshop held in conjunction with LAI's Land Economics Weekend and involved interested LAI membership who reviewed and suggested refinements to the program and further developed implementation actions. (See Appendix 2)

This document presents the Quality of Life Program developed through the above process.

It is a synthesis of ideas and projects suggested by the community and refined by the contributions of land economics experts. As a result, it represents a compendium of considered actions to guide Río Piedras as it moves forward with its rehabilitation and rejuvenation.

COMMUNITY PLANNING ISSUES IN RÍO PIEDRAS

Local Challenges and Conditions

Located in central San Juan, (See Figure 1) Río Piedras is an older, once thriving community, which has experienced depopulation and disinvestment. In terms of walkability and character, it might be likened to a 20th Century Old San Juan. It was once a separate municipality before being annexed into greater San Juan along with several other adjacent communities and served as a central transportation hub and commercial center.

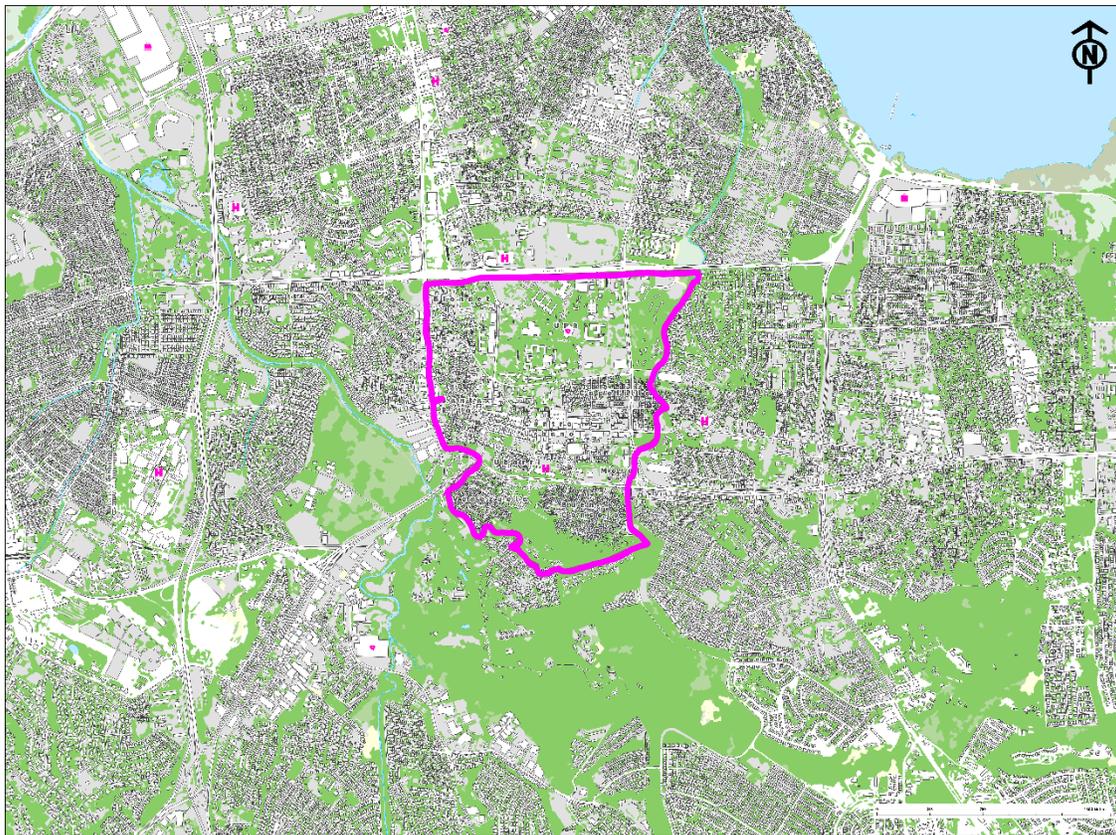


Figure 3. Location of Río Piedras within San Juan

It continues to be a vital community, consisting of twelve barrios (neighborhoods, eight of which are the target area), a walkable and connected commercial core and direct adjacency to the University of Puerto Rico main campus. Yet, the community is under stress, showing substantial infrastructure needs, many vacancies in its commercial district, and residences of varying size, quality and condition. Numerous residences are currently vacant, many of which have been foreclosed upon by banks or the Municipality of San Juan due to mortgage or tax delinquencies.

There have been several attempts to plan for the improvement of the community. Probably the most significant was the preparation of a Comprehensive Development Plan in 1996 by the Puerto Rico Planning Board, the entity charged with conducting all planning on the Island. This was followed by the development of a city-initiated redevelopment plan in 2012, which was not driven or supported by the community as it was expected to encourage gentrification, dispossession and a loss of the traditional character of the community.¹ As a consequence, the community developed a new locally-based leadership structure to enable a community-based redevelopment and improvement effort. This new effort has been ratified through the passage of Law 75-1995 and amended by Law 39-2016, which together are known as the Special Law for the Rehabilitation of Río Piedras. These Laws enabled the creation of the Trust for the Development of Río Piedras (FDPR) which is managed by a local board that is currently obtaining its 501(c)3 status.

The community improvement leadership entities are organized as follows:

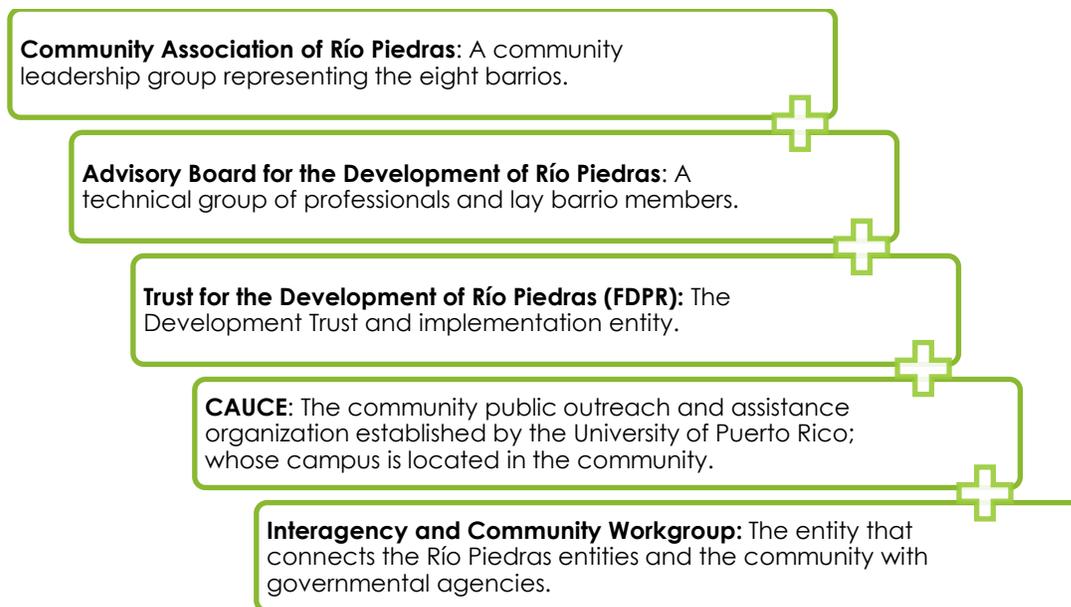


Figure 4. Organizations working on behalf of the community

The figure above illustrates that there is significant overlap in the leadership of these organizations.

¹ Urban Planning students at the University of Puerto Rico have also investigated the issues and needs of Río Piedras. Appendix 3 to this report contains the results of a SWOT analysis recently prepared by the students that summarize their findings regarding the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing the community.

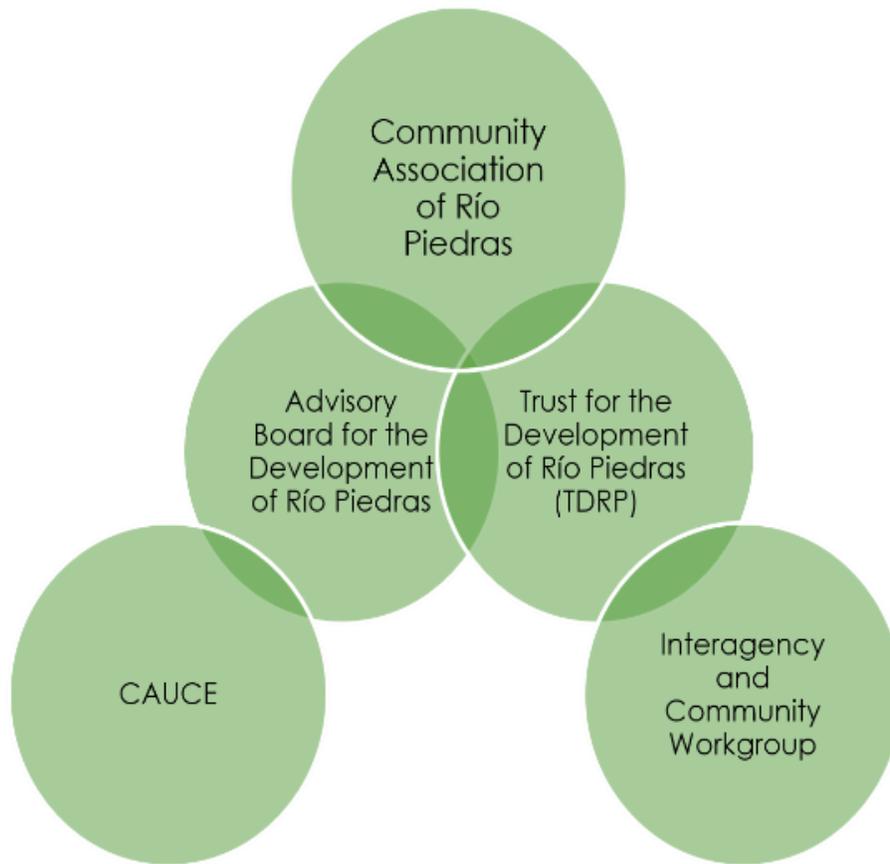


Figure 5. Community Organizations in Río Piedras

During the past few years, these groups have struggled to agree on how to address the future of the community. Certain voices called for the creation of a revised and updated 1996 Comprehensive plan. Other voices called for a more implementation-oriented approach to address a number of agreed-upon needs with some type of action program. As there has been extensive public involvement over the past several years without any forward movement, many members of the leadership are concerned about losing community support and missing the “investment boat” as population loss and a weakening economy further limits opportunity in Río Piedras.

Perhaps one reason for the difficulty in moving forward has been the size of the challenge. Puerto Rico faces difficult times. The Territory has overwhelming debt and has suffered the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and María. Austerity measures imposed by a US federal fiscal oversight group, PROMESA, will require the government of the Commonwealth to reduce funding allocated to municipalities, placing further stress on the fiscal condition of the cities. Further, Río Piedras, like most parts of Puerto Rico is seeing a loss of population and weakening of its economic base.



Figure 6. The emblematic tower of the University of Puerto Rico in the Río Piedras Campus, a major presence in the neighborhood

While the basis of a strong community remains – a modestly active commercial center, good transit, and established neighborhoods, the market for its commercial area is shrinking. A cursory examination of the community suggests that the challenge is in managing its change to accommodate lesser and perhaps more diverse populations while seeking a more concentrated and diversified commercial footprint.

At the same time, it will be important to make an effort to recover vacant houses and commercial buildings that have been foreclosed upon by banks or taken by the City due to tax delinquencies, and attempt to repopulate these units as much as possible by getting them back on the market at prices affordable to the local

population. Thus, a program to improve the quality of life for its present and future residents and businesses will need to address these issues in a manner that enriches the traditional character of the community, optimizes current public and private assets, and instills a sense of commitment for the community, government and investors to work together.

Eight of the twelve barrios which comprise Río Piedras are the focus of the Quality of Life Program. These eight barrios are arranged around the commercial center and the main campus of the University of Puerto Rico. Population is currently estimated as approximately 10,000 and has dropped significantly over time due to the population exodus to the mainland, and the economic difficulties occurring on the Island. Figure 3 provides a map of the community and Figure 4 provides a sense of current conditions. A map of the 10-minute walk area surrounding the commercial core of Río Piedras together with associated statistics is provided in Appendix 3.

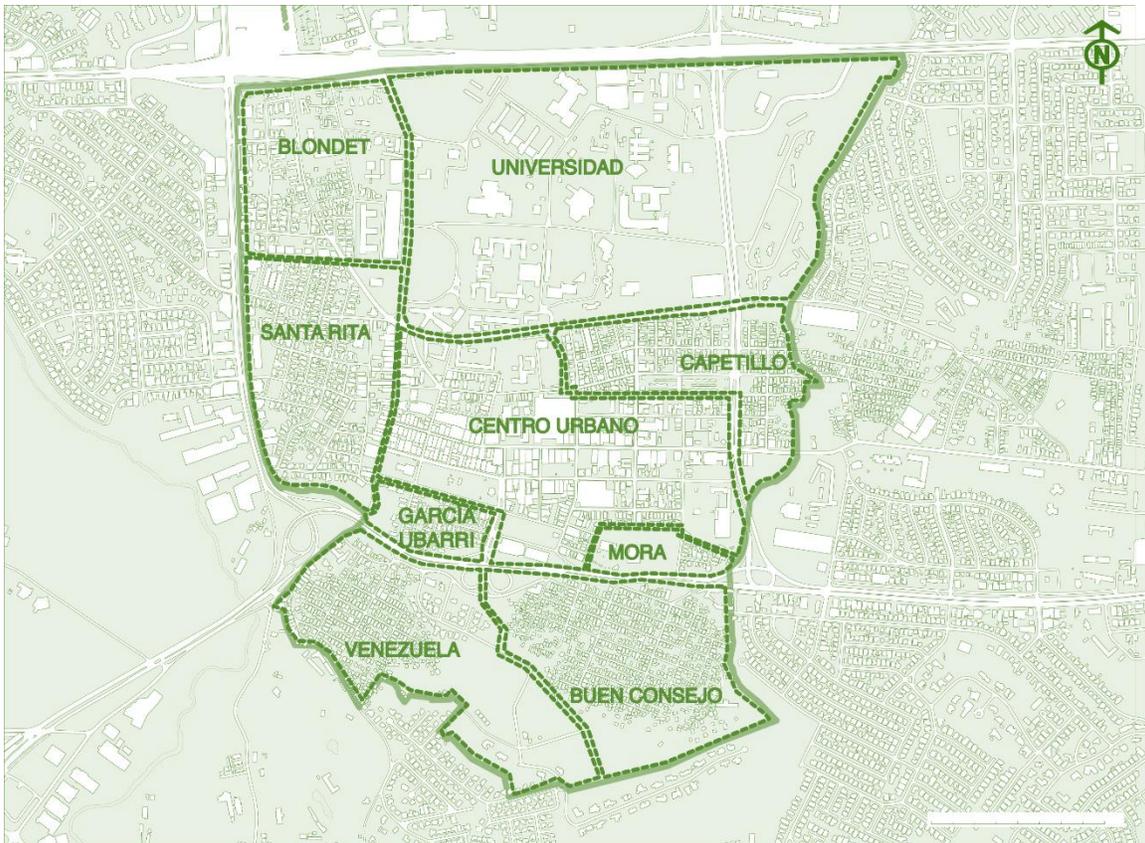


Figure 7. Map of the communities of Río Piedras

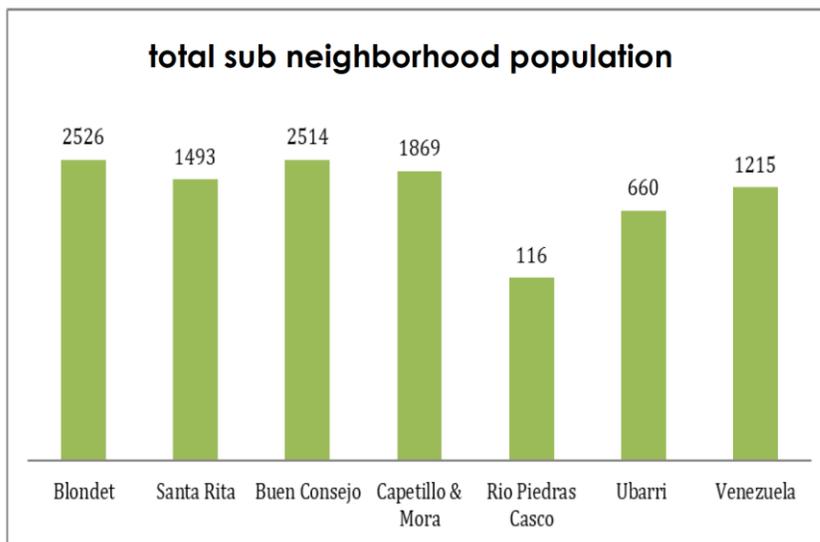


Figure 8. Community Demographics; US Census 2010, New estimates ACS 2016 place population slightly above 7,000

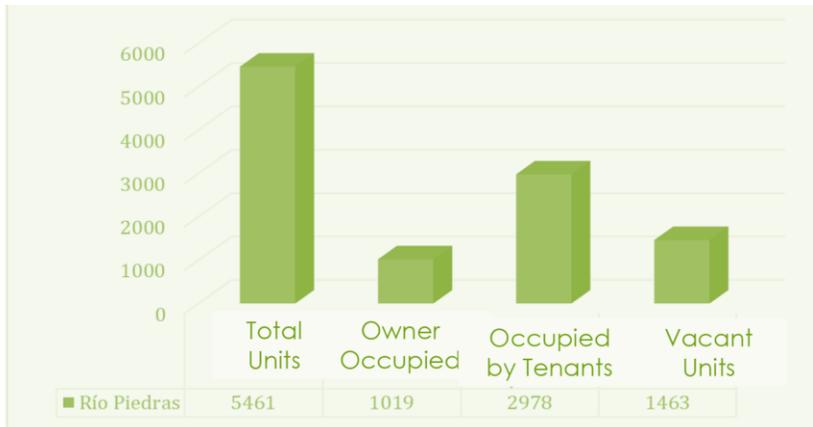


Figure 9. Occupation of Housing and Tenancy, US Census 2010

Summary of Findings Needs Assessment Infrastructure Impact Hurricane María, Río Piedras			
Neighborhood	Roof Damage	Partial Destruction	Total Destruction
Venezuela	29	25	25
Buen Consejo	5	39	69
Blondet	2	9	0
Capetillo	18	7	6

Figure 10. Summary of Findings Hurricane María

THE PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

During the first community meeting held during a weeklong community work session held on February 12, 2019, members of the community divided themselves up into groups to identify the key issues, assets and liabilities of Río Piedras.

A representative list of the issues discussed follows:

Issues of Concern	Assets	What is Needed?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security • Housing • Vacant buildings • Homeless persons • Drug Abuse • Lack of green spaces • Stray Cats • Parking • Crime • Drug shooting galleries • Abandoned buildings/crack houses • Lighting/streetlights • Garbage • Male prostitution • Low population • Proliferation of bars • Inappropriate use of pedestrian spaces • Separation of community and university • Lack of awareness of businesses/shops • Inconsistent security • Unemployment • Access to health services • Neglect of elderly persons • Traffic congestion • Taking overhead electrical cables underground • Painting/ building facades • Hurricane debris and remains • Illegal garbage dumps • Missing meter box lids • Recycling program • Security (theft, crime) • Preservation of historic and architectural heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized community • Zarzuela-Los Balcones area • Social Work • Caritas • CAUCE • La Olla Común • Casa Ruth • Bookstores • Mesón de Amor • Central, downtown area • Accessible • Bike Friendly • Verde Luz Project • EL Roble Newspaper • Café Pariso • UPR • Tren Urbano stations • Entrepreneurial community • Mixed use • Capicú Adentro Art Gallery • Cultural Activities • Committed business owners • Talent Bank • University High School • Walkable • Botanical Gardens • Immigrants • Parking lots • Market Place • Vegetable Garden • Diverse Population • Organized Community • Unique Architecture • Educational System • Nueva Escuela Inst. • Aqueducts • Town Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighting + recreational spaces • Empty spaces → parking lots • Transforming use of spaces • recreational/commercial • Promoting collaboration between NGO's and public policy—city ordinances • Establish more bonds with the community (e.g., students) • Erase the lines that divide the community from the students • Community accessibility to UPR • Workshops/study groups for the community within campus • Extend the college campus to the town center • Promote student entrepreneurship through weekly activities • Engage government representatives • Promote private investment • Maximize help of community representatives • Special regulations for RP to aid development • Promote cultural activities • Establish more bonds with the community (e.g., students) • Erase the lines that divide the community from the students

COMMUNITY VISION AND STRATEGIES

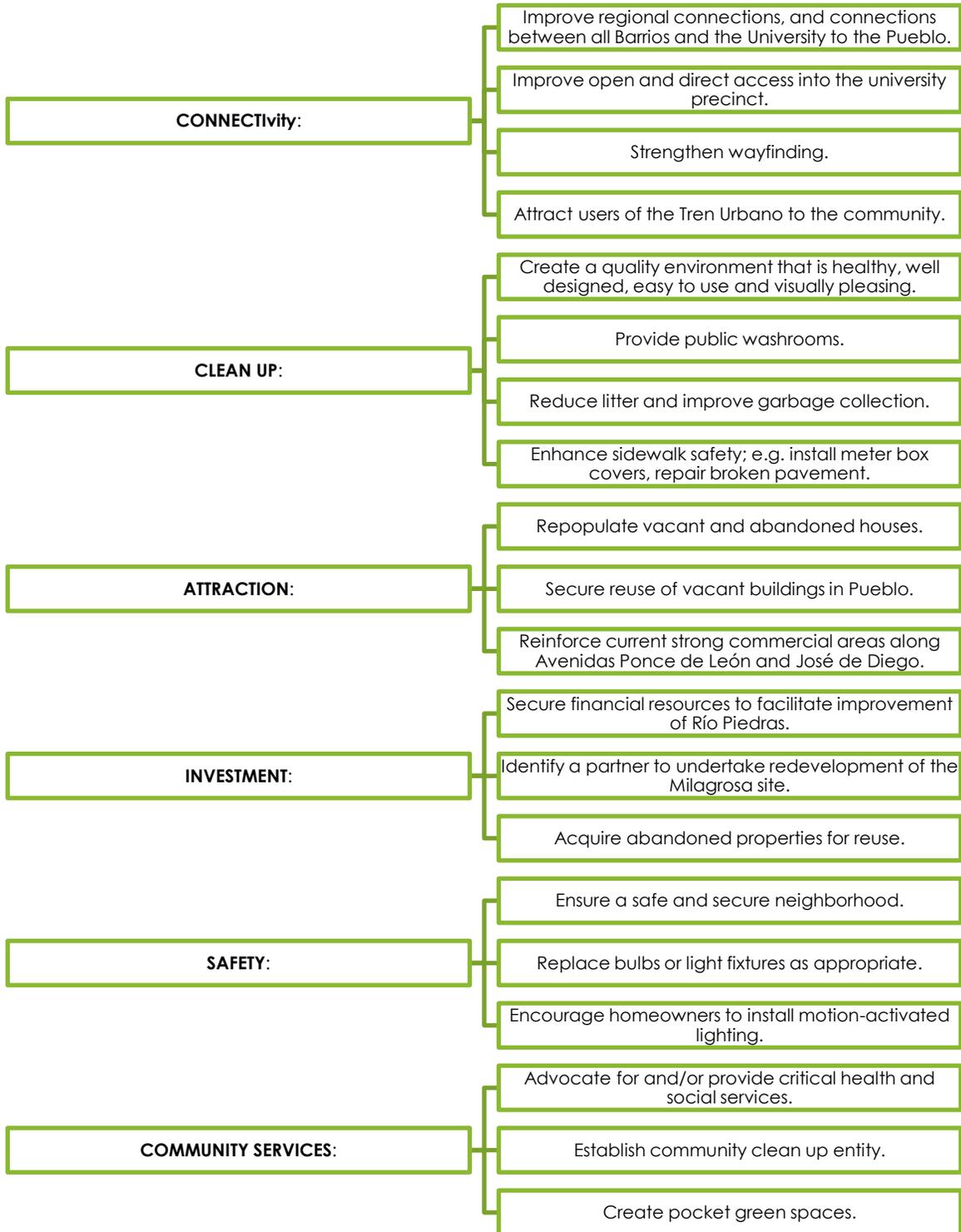
Acknowledging the issues to be addressed, the community members met again during the July 12th work week to jointly discuss and develop a 5-10-year vision of the community, and to agree upon the strategies that should be jointly pursued by all interested parties to reach that vision. The agreed upon vision is stated below:

Vision: A safe, clean, walkable, mixed-income community that welcomes students, families, and people of all ages to its thriving barrios that are strongly linked to an active commercial center creating a Río Piedras that is well-connected to the larger San Juan community as a center of unique shopping, education and entertainment that celebrates and uses art-based programs as a key driver of community development.



Figure 11. Community members actively participate in the deliberative process

The strategies to be followed to reach this vision are listed below:



RÍO PIEDRAS QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAM

The planning workshop evaluated each of these strategies and developed a host of related projects that could be used to help realize the vision. These projects represent a collection of activities underway, projects that are desired but stalled due to a lack of current funding and new ideas. Securing the right sponsors or champions could well help to realize important elements of the Quality of Life Program vision.

These projects are presented in the following pages in a matrix that connects each one to a particular strategy, an implementation time-frame, and a list of those organizations which will take responsibility for project refinement and implementation as well as those organizations that will provide additional support to its implementation.



Figure 12. Members of the project team met with residents to collect information and opinions

RÍO PIEDRAS QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAM VISION

A SAFE, CLEAN, WALKABLE, MIXED INCOME COMMUNITY THAT WELCOMES STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TO ITS THRIVING BARRIOS THAT ARE STRONGLY LINKED TO AN ACTIVE COMMERCIAL CENTER. A RÍO PIEDRAS WELL-CONNECTED TO THE LARGER SAN JUAN COMMUNITY AS A CENTER OF UNIQUE SHOPPING, EDUCATION AND ENTERTAINMENT THAT CELEBRATES AND USES ART-BASED PROGRAMS AS A KEY DRIVER OF COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT.

Strategy. Ways to focus investments to achieve community goals	Project. Activities to realize the strategies	Time Frame. Organized in short, mid and long term timeframes			Supporting Organizations. Entities that will take responsibility for organizing and implementing projects	Responsible Party. Individual or organization that takes responsibility for project
		S	M	L		
CONNECTIVITY: Improve regional connections, and connections between all Barrios and the University to the Pueblo	1. Develop more open and direct access into university precinct from Community		M		UPR JCRP CAUCE FDRP	JCRP FDRP
	2. Establish effective wayfinding signage and entryways from City into Río Piedras	S			MSJ FDRP	FDRP
	3. Improve visual and physical connection between bus terminals and shopping district		M		MSJ JCRP FDRP	JCRP

	4. Light the bridge connecting Buen Consejo and El Centro	S			DTOP AEE MSJ JCRP	JCRP
	5. Create pedestrian and bike connection between Venezuela and el Centro			L	MSJ CAUCE JCRP FDRP	JCRP
	6. Increase marketing of Río Piedras as a place to shop and visit.	S			FDRP UPR	FDRP
	7. Rejuvenate regional jitney businesses		M		DTOP MSJ JCRP FDRP	JCRP
	8. Encourage bike usage within the community	S			CAUCE MSJ DTOP	CAUCE
	9. Extend or develop UPR programs within El Centro		M		CAUCE UPR	CAUCE
	10. Redesign one-way street system			L	DTOP MSJ JCRP FDRP	MSJ
	11. Extend current trolley route		M		MSJ JCRP	MSJ

CLEAN UP: Create a quality environment that is healthy, well designed, easy to use and visually pleasing	1. Provide public washrooms			L	FDRP JCRP	MSJ
	2. Increase litter and garbage removal	S			CC JCRP	MSJ
	3. Improve streets and sidewalks		M		CC FDRP	MSJ
	4. Clean up/repaint facades of vacant buildings	S			CC JCRP	FDRP
	5. Reduce extent of stray animals	S			CC	MSJ
	6. Provide additional garbage bins for residences and in business district	S			CC	MSJ
	7. Remove all unused overhead wires			L	MSJ	DTOP
	8. Remove remaining hurricane debris.	S			CC JCRP	MSJ
	9. Fill sidewalk holes and remove sidewalk obstacles.				CC	MSJ DTOP

	10. Remove abandoned vehicles	S			CC	MSJ
	11. Coordinate artistic program mural development		M		JCRP	FDRP
	12. Support a streetscape improvement program		M		CC JCRP	FDRP
	13. Paint Paradise Theater Façade as a mural representation of historic building	S			FDRP	JCRP
	14. Partnership program between UPR and FDRP to enable students to help enhance the community	S			CAUCE FDRP	CAUCE FDRP
	15. Remove scrapped vehicles at entrance of Avenida Ponce de León		M		CC JCRP	MSJ
ATTRACTION: Repopulate vacant and abandoned houses	1. Secure reuse of vacant buildings in Río Piedras		M	L	JCRP FDRP MSJ	FDRP MSJ
	2. Reinforce current strong commercial	S	M	L	CAUCE JCRP	CAUCE FDRP

	areas along Avenida Ponce de León and Jose Diego				CC FDRP	MSJ
	3. Increase and Improve direct connections between UPR and community		M		CAUCE JCRP MSJ	MSJ DTOP
	4. Develop unused public spaces into green areas	S			JCRP CC CAUCE	JCRP
	5. Reduce extent of homelessness		M	L	MSJ Central Govt.	Central Govt.
	6. Formulate Río Piedras branding pgm	S			FDRP CC JCRP	FDRP CC JCRP
	7. Provide housing and commercial project rehabilitation assistance		M		CC CAUCE	CC
	8. Establish food truck site at Ponce de León and Robles		M		FDRP MSJ	MSJ
	9. Activate Robles plaza		M		DTOP CAUCE JCRP CC FDRP	DTOP

	10. Encourage immediate rehabilitation of Saldanas-Ponce de León Building for housing (N.E. corner)		M		MSJ FDRP	MSJ
	11. Establish an Art Deco District encompassing the central portion of the Pueblo		H		FRDP	
	12. Increase housing choice to include public and affordable housing, student housing and employer assisted housing		M			
INVESTMENT: Secure financial resources to facilitate improvement of Río Piedras.	1. Find a partner to undertake redevelopment of Millagrosa Site		M		FDRP	FDRP
	2. Acquire abandoned properties for reuse or remarketing		M	L	FDRP	FDRP
	3. Interest larger San Juan Development	S	M	L	FDRP	FDRP

	community in Río Piedras					
	4. Tax or development incentives for new business location in RP		M	L	JCRP CC FDRP MSJ PR Legislature	PR Legislature
	5. Develop a housing investment fund.			L	FDRP	FDRP
	6. Develop a community wide property data base	S	M		CC CAUCE	CC
	7. FDRP to act as intermediary between private development investor and city	S	M	L	FDRP	FDRP
	8. FRDP to establish a portfolio of real estate owned and available by FDRP or other public entities		M	L	FDRP	FDRP
SAFETY: A safe and secure neighborhood.	1. Replace bulbs or light fixtures as appropriate	S	M		CC JCRP MSJ DTOP	CC

	2. Encourage homeowners to install motion-activated lighting		M	L	JCRP FDRP	FDRP
	3. Establish a program of community security patrols	S	M		JCRP CAUCE	CAUCE
	4. Increase policing for drug sales reduction.		M		MSJ Central Govt.	MSJ Central Govt.
	5. Better lighting to reduce drug sale sites		M		DTOP	DTOP
COMMUNITY SERVICES: Advocate for and/or to provide critical health and social services to within Río Piedras	1. Community clean up entity		M		JCRP	JCRP
	2. Pocket green spaces	S			JCRP	JCRP
	3. Provide opportunities for local involvement by RP residents and businesses.	S			JCRP	JCRP
	4. Increase services at CDT clinic		M	L	MSJ	MSJ

	5. Medical services transport services		M		MSJ	MSJ
	6. Additional community gardens	S	M		JCRP CAUCE	JCRP CAUCE
	7. Neighborhood health services facilities.			L	MSJ	MSJ
	8. Support transport services like "Pon de la UPI" and BiciCoop	S	M		JCRP CAUCE	CAUCE

FOUR KEY STRATEGIC PROJECTS

Following review of the project list developed through the Community Meeting process, four **key strategic projects** were identified for further attention by the PAD. These are:

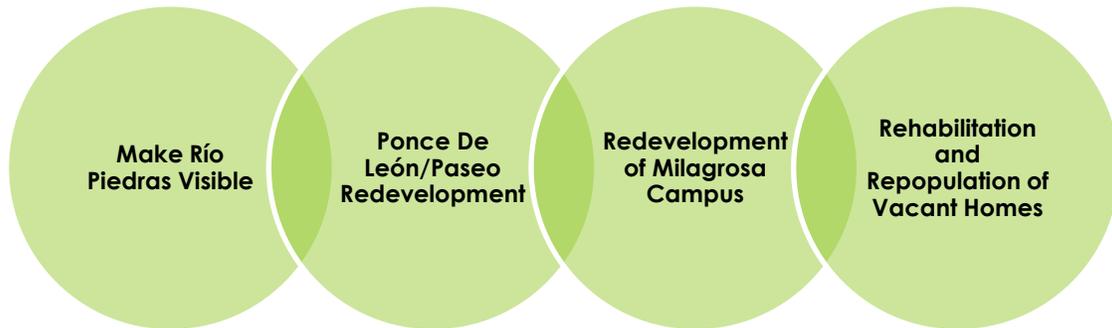


Figure 13. Four key strategic projects for Río Piedras

Make Río Piedras Visible

Finding Río Piedras can be a challenge to the uninitiated. While Río Piedras has been historically well connected by bus, and now by the Tren Urbano, the San Juan rapid transit line, it is difficult to access by car. Historic strong linkages such as Avenida Ponce de León, which connects Río Piedras to Old San Juan, while remaining, have been bypassed through the development of larger scale arterials and freeways. The result is that the community is not well connected to the major city arterial grid.

Actions need to be taken to facilitate a clear and visible series of access routes into and around Río Piedras. Figure 14 identifies the key entry points in the community where attention must be given to improving the traffic and visual connection to San Juan's major transportation system. Figure 15 shows the key internal connections within Río Piedras. Figure 16 illustrates the extent of interchange to be accommodated between the eight barrios and Centro Urbano. It is suggested that the University of Puerto Rico planning department convene planning charettes to identify alternatives to resolve this issue.

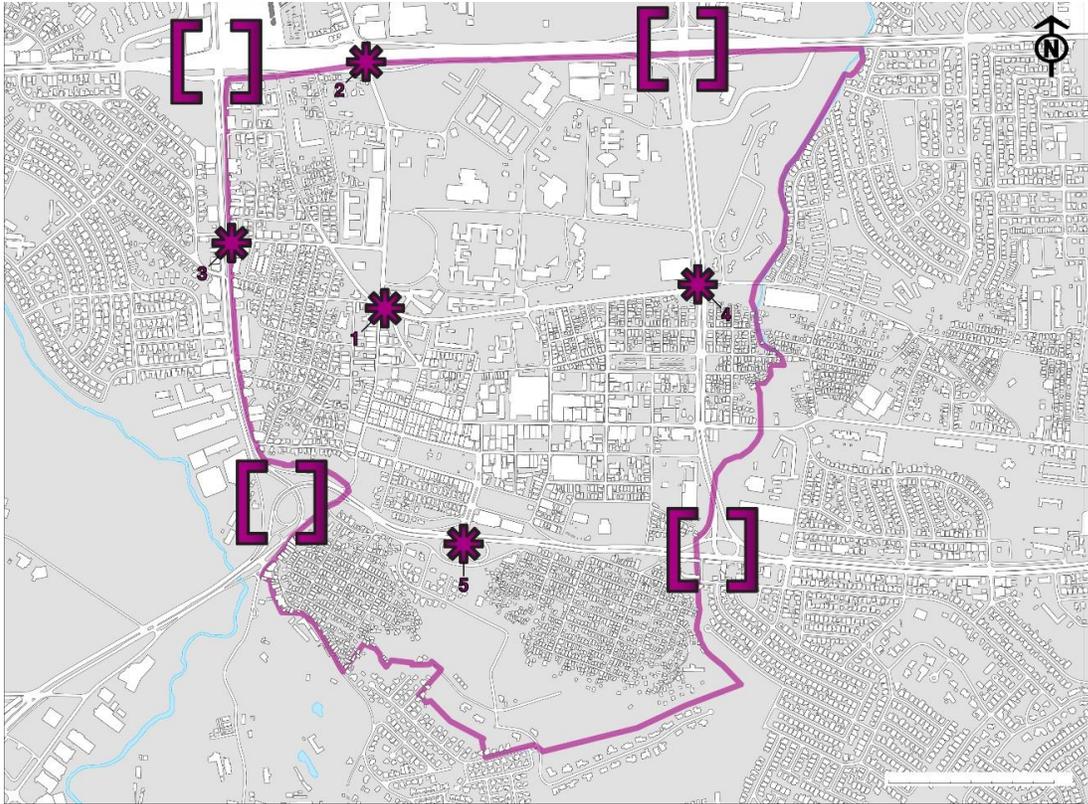


Figure 14. key entry points in the community where attention must be given to improving the traffic and visual connection to San Juan's major transportation system

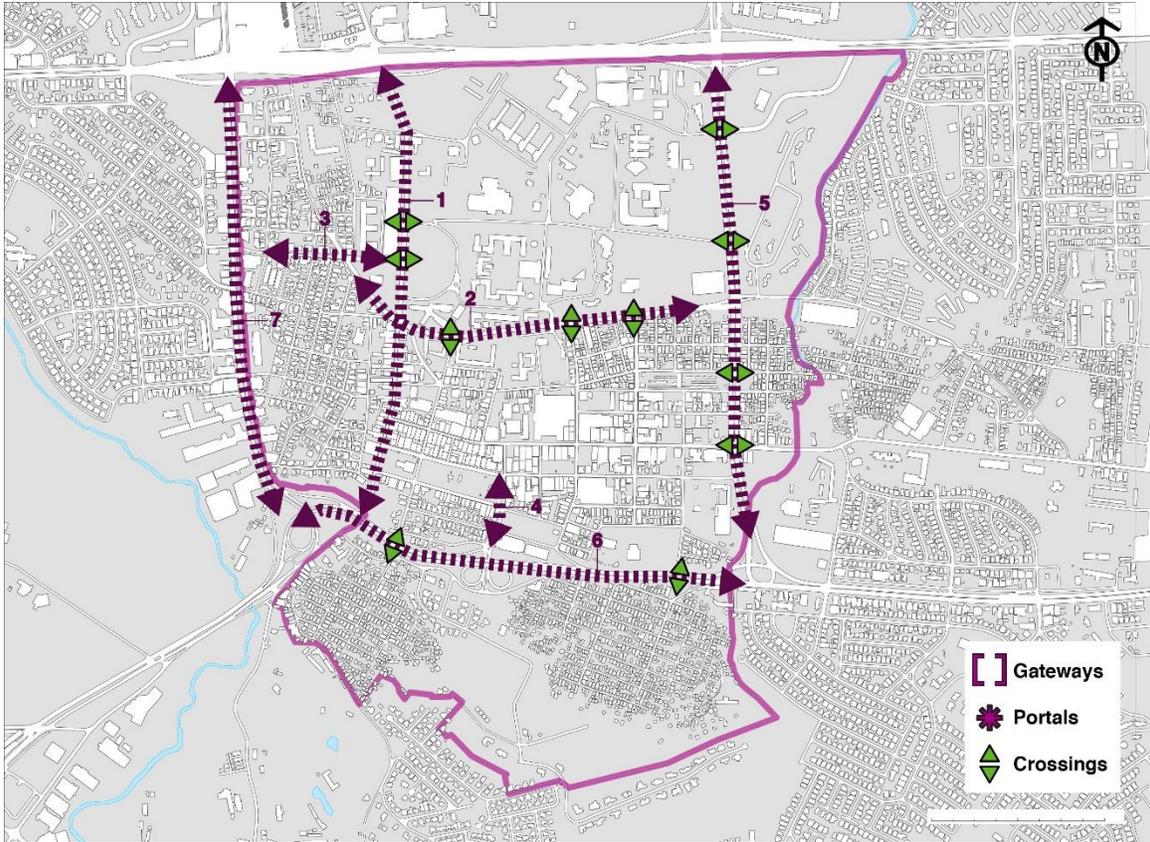


Figure 15. Access Within Río Piedras

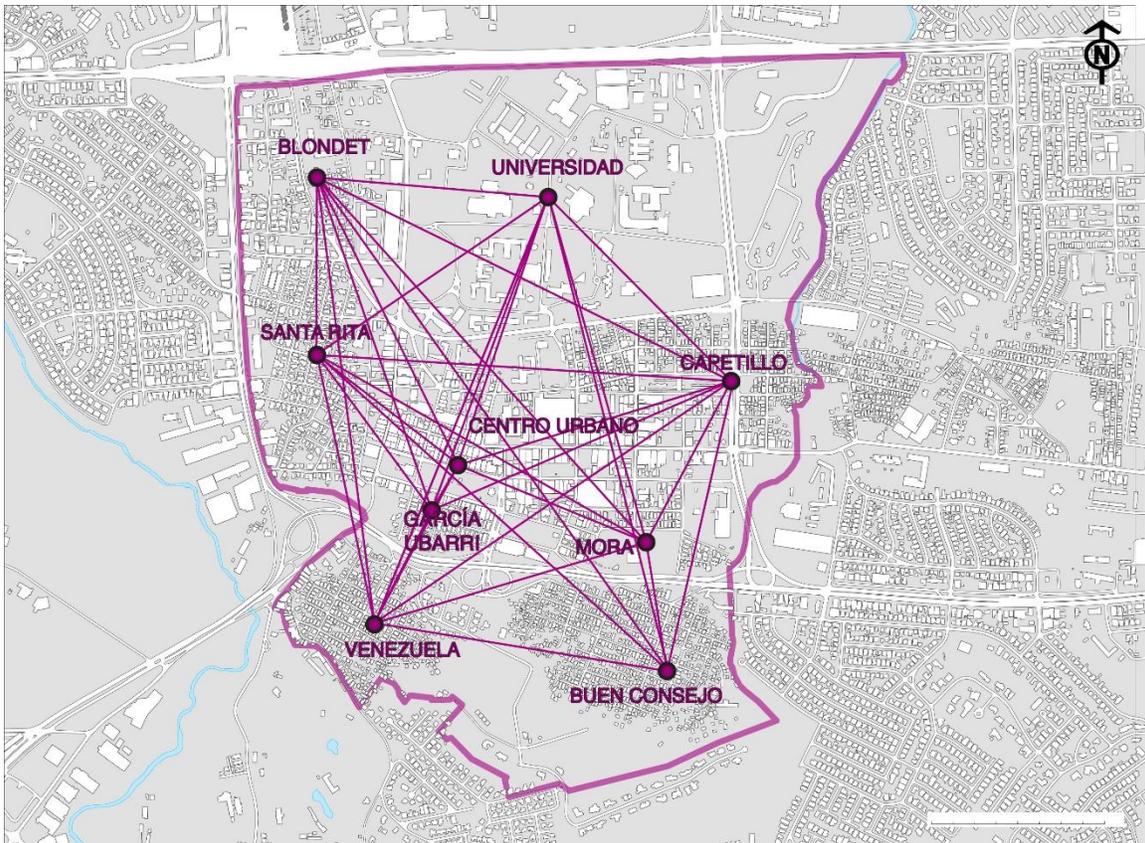


Figure 16. Interconnections Between Barrios

Ponce De León/Paseo Redevelopment

Located in the central portion of Centro Urbano in Río Piedras, Avenida Ponce de León and the Paseo were once part of the community's dynamic center. Redevelopment of this area is considered to be vital to the redevelopment of the community.

It is suggested that the PAD consider identifying those actions and investments that might be most beneficial to initiate and stimulate this redevelopment. Given the scope of viable, but underutilized assets in this area the project team suggests an asset-based series of community development attractions, investment, connectivity, safety, clean up strategies working from strengths along a gateway Avenida Ponce de León.

Consider: While a cursory ride down Ponce De León presents a sense of vacancy and underdevelopment, a more detailed survey of the street shows it to be quite viable. For example, the 1000 through the 1100 block on Ponce De León has many assets, such as four book stores that are presently open and operating, two separate entrances to the train station,

a bike shop, a tattoo shop, a lunch business, and several smaller technical/trade schools.

Avenida Juan Ponce de León also intersects with several cross streets such as Paseo de Diego, Calle Arzuaga, Calle Georgetti, Calle Robles and Calle Saldaña. Each one of these cross streets connects to some other asset or area of strength that supports this street as an early improvement target.

Starting from the south, Casa Ruth, at Calle Georgetti, represents a community strength as daily community programs exist there, and it is known as a site to attract community residents. At Calle Arzuaga is the first entrance to the Tren Urbano where a small bar is located that should be enticed to upgrade its appearance to make it a more inviting partner at that corner. Paseo de Diego, flanked by the beautiful facade of the former Banco Popular, is the gateway to the Mercado. Although many of the businesses on this end are closed, the Paseo transitions to open and thriving businesses just before the Mercado, which remains a strong community asset.

Moving north toward Calle Robles, where the Paradise Theatre is located, is the second entrance to the Tren Urbano. This station also has available market spaces accessed through the transit system. Continuing north on Ponce de León to Calle Robles, the street is first interrupted by the empty space that is already occupied by a food truck. This practice should be encouraged. Calle Robles represents yet another path to successful businesses such as the El Boricua and the Flor De Parcha. Moving north to the end of the Avenida Juan Ponce de León are the previously referenced bookstores that serve a mostly university clientele, and create the foot traffic that is needed to keep eyes on the street and draw customers that can support additional businesses.

Avenida Juan Ponce de León should be targeted for early investment. As a gateway it provides access to some of the community's strongest assets. It is properly supported by the transit line for those that presently use it. It represents a direct linkage to UPR for its students. Its few challenges are its opportunities for development; some immediate, some to be adopted as the community grows. The first development opportunity should address the large vacant housing structure at Robles where its proximity to successful businesses is an advantage for all.



Figure 15. Paradise Theater awaiting rehabilitation



Figure 17. Traditional building along Ponce de León Avenue



Figure 16. Emblematic building by the Avenida Ponce de León

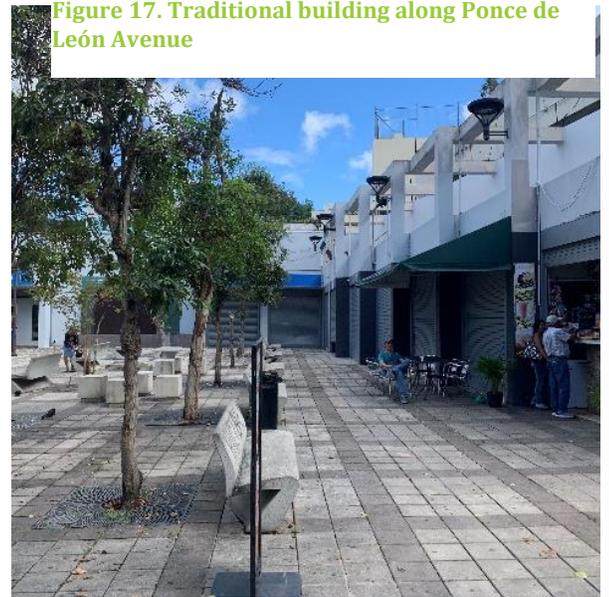


Figure 18. Underutilized plaza next to train station



Figure 19. Entryway to underground train station

As art is considered a key aspect of the community vision, beautification projects such as landscaping, sidewalk repair, and maintenance should be targeted early to set the stage for redevelopment. An important first step is also to prepare an inventory of existing resources so one can determine the additional assets needed in order to attract a successful partner to this work. It is clearly a priority to reach out to existing owners such as the owner Sophie-Jesse, LLP, who is currently rehabbing their property.

Building on the arts aspect of our vision it is proposed that an “Art Deco” Historic District be established, encompassing the key commercial blocks of el Centro, perhaps bounded by and including Avenida Jose N. Gandara, Calle William Jones Calle Georgetti and Avenida Ponce de Leon. This district could be established as a special service district or special taxing area that would allow services to be enhanced within it. It should contain zoning rules to project the art deco character of so many of its buildings. Perhaps the funds from this district could be used to enhance the conditions on contributing buildings, and the adjacent public environment. (see Figure 10.

Establishment of an Art Deco District would not only protect the integrity of this resource but could also become a major visitor attraction. Indeed, this district may underlie a broader Arts Theme within el Centro which celebrates and attracts the arts culture found in the neighborhood in the form of quality street and wall graphics, occupancy of stores by art oriented commercial uses and galleries, local theatres and performing venues and neighborhood culture. This could form the core of a cultural art program advocating and supporting art related activities such as gallery walks, art fairs, artist-oriented work-live facilities, university connected visual, performing and literary arts programs. Indeed, the opportunity also exists to extend the district to the bar and restaurant area along Avenida Gandara north to and across Avenida Universidad.

Emphasis on the arts – literary, performing, graphic – within Rio Piedras could set the community apart from the larger San Juan community creating a special cache; creating enhanced residential and commercial investment opportunities. Care should be taken, however, to manage this program such that it doesn’t begin to create a sense of “gentrification” that would change the market image of the community and begin to price out the current population.

Yet, such a theme could help to attract investment needed to improve the Paradise Theater, increase local dining choices, and reinvest in the quality buildings found within Rio Piedras.

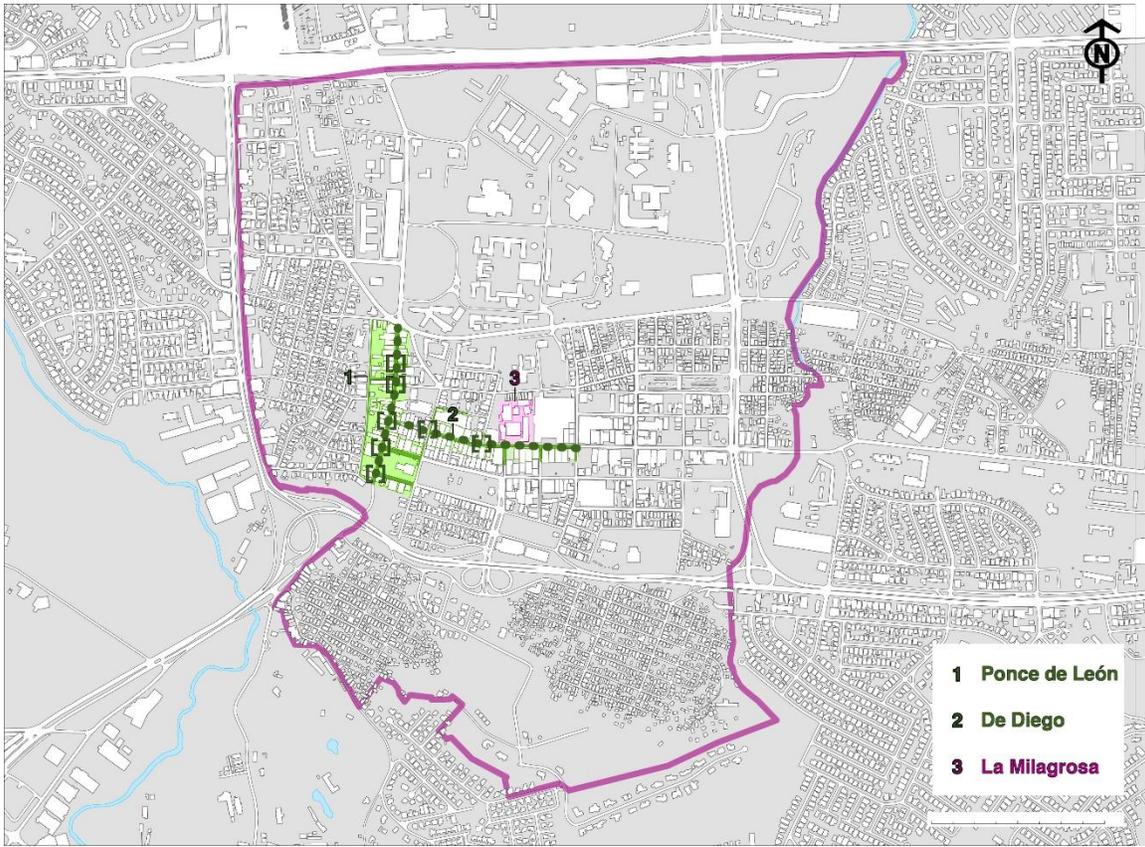


Figure 20. Key Project Proposals



Figure 21. Three Key Proposals

Redevelopment of Milagrosa Campus

The Milagrosa property (#3 above), a vacant former Catholic Church and High School centrally located within the Centro Urbano, represents a major gap in the economic viability of the community's commercial district. Action is needed to redevelop this property. It is a large site adjacent to Avenida Ponce de Leon (#1 above), the Paseo (#2 above) and the Mercado offering buildings suitable for rehabilitation and structures that can be demolished for new development sites. Its size, location, and condition make it a potentially powerful catalyst for change in the critical commercial district of the Centro Urbano.

This is clearly the most important challenge and opportunity within the neighborhood. It presents an opportunity to reinvigorate the central area with a mixed-use project that will increase housing and commercial activities there. It also represents an opportunity to facilitate a redevelopment which physically links the University to this central district, and which could also accommodate certain university activities within the area. Several key actions are needed:



Figure 22. La Milagrosa. A major redevelopment site within the heart of Río Piedras

- Document the size, configuration, and condition of the structures on the site, and the need to upgrade or replace utilities and infrastructure.
- Evaluate the physical reuse potential of the site as a whole, including potential rehabilitation of structures, likely required demolition, and sites for infill or replacement development.

- Investigate the potential of other institutional users, such as colleges or universities, to occupy some or all or some the site.
- Analyze the market potential of non-institutional uses, including residential, office, retail, co-working space, small-scale manufacturing and “maker space”, and artists.
- Develop a preliminary land use program and financial feasibility analysis.
- Seek a financial and development partners through a competitive RFQ/RFP process.
- Work with the selected developer to refine the land use program, formulate a financing and development plan, and negotiate the terms of a public/private development effort.
- Convey to the financial and development partner an interest in property via long term lease or purchase and sale agreement.
- Alternatively, engage a developer on a contract basis to execute the development.

The redevelopment of this campus is probably the most important redevelopment activity that can be undertaken within the Pueblo. Its redevelopment as a mixed-use project of significant critical mass could provide 24-hour activity and stimulate adjacent reinvestment helping to reinvigorate the Paseo and the improvement of El Centro.

As a key program within el Centro, redevelopment planning for Milagrosa should be undertaken within the context of a larger area than the specific site, for example that area shown in Figure 13. This would allow for an assessment as to how its redevelopment could facilitate better connections with and foster reinvestment in adjacent commercial, educational uses, and how it can be used as a stimulant to the reinvigoration of the Paseo de Diego.



Figure 23. Art Deco character of the commercial center

Rehabilitation and Repopulation of Vacant Homes

This is a most critical issue, as the community cannot effectively improve its barrios without rehabilitating and utilizing the substantial vacant housing stock or those units in poor condition. This represents a repopulation strategy to encourage occupation of this underutilized resource and strengthen the population and economic base of the community. Key actions involve the following:

- Compile data on ownership of all properties, including number, location, value, condition, tenure status of foreclosures and specific bank ownership, tax delinquency seizures currently owned by the City, and any others.
- For City-owned properties, facilitate transfer to Río Piedras Development Trust (FDRP) at no or low cost.
- Prepare a FDRP development marketing package for investors identifying unit prices that would support rehabilitation and sale at affordable cost while generating investment return.
- For foreclosures, work with banks to establish portfolio(s) of REO and to develop investor offering packages. Negotiate pricing based on

- need for renovation and investor return, including grouping of offerings to attract investors.
- Enlist help from Center for the New Economy, banks, and the municipality to compile data and to identify key development partners to which to disseminate the property offerings.
 - Work with UPR to have students conduct field research to confirm and map vacancies and photograph and describe the condition of the units.
 - Work with UPR, as necessary, to ensure the availability of student housing subsidies which can be used for off-site housing.
 - FDRP should seek funds to repair and improve homes they own prior to marketing to investors/developers.
 - FDRP should work with affordable housing partners to own and manage low income rentals.
 - Focus on an area specific demonstration of housing improvement. This might be achieved through a “model” block demonstration wherein a focused approach to improving existing housing and adjacent infrastructure is undertaken, along with accommodating some examples of newer housing types within one or more barrios. These “model” blocks could be a practical demonstration as to what might be accomplished within the larger barrio, both through private and public investment as well as local volunteer support.



Figure 24. Example of the housing stock in one of the sub barrios of Río Piedras

While improvement of existing housing stock is a critical issue, the need and opportunity to increase the range of housing choice through new housing development should not be overlooked. Much of our current housing is limited in size and is, in many ways obsolete in terms of contemporary living. The community should also seize upon opportunities to increase its housing stock through improvement of upper story space within el Centro, and the development of new housing stock to accommodate affordable, student, employer assisted, and middle income living. Further, it should address the opportunity of securing public housing investment as well as private sector development.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Initial Agenda of Weeklong Río Piedras Quality of Life Workshop

Host: FDRP
Dates: February 10 – 17th, 2019
Site: Río Piedras

Day 1. SUNDAY. February 10th, 2019

- Arrival in San Juan
- Briefing dinner in Río Piedras with leads of RP groups @ Flor de Parcha

Day 2. MONDAY. February 11th, 2019

8:30 Introduction to RP and Tour (1 hr)

9:30: Meeting 1 Housing issues

10:30 Meeting 2 Economic Development Issues

11:30: Meeting 3 Infrastructure Issues

Lunch Review and Questions with RP leaders

1:30: Meeting 4 Health and social service issues

2:30 Meeting 5 Public Safety Issues

3:30 Prep for community meeting

community review maps

Where is crime in neighborhood?

Where is best housing, worse housing?

Where are greatest street and sidewalk problems?

Where do you live?

Where do you shop?

Where do you work?

Where are drainage problems?

Where is worst traffic congestion?

5:30-8 EVENING MEETING

INTRODUCTION: RP 10 MIN

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES (LAI INTRO) 20 MIN

BREAK dinner 45 min

BREAKOUT GROUPS BASED UPON ISSUE CATEGORIES 45 minutes

(EG. Infrastructure, economic development, safety and security, housing improvement, health and social services (breakout could be by topic or my barrio depending upon size of group. If limited to community leaders, perhaps by category.

REPORT BACK (30 minutes)

Conclusions and next steps 15 minutes

- AM: Introduction to Río Piedras including further touring & discussion of previous efforts
- Lunch: briefing session meeting with leads to discuss adjustments to work program as appropriate, refinements to initial strategy and action ideas for presentation to Community Leadership
- PM: setup of community meeting
- Evening / @ 5pm: *Community Meeting 1*
 - LAI team introduction
 - Quality of Life Program background presentation
 - LAI agenda

Day 3. TUESDAY. February 12th, 2019

- Work day for LAI members
 - additional meetings with additional subject information providers
 - Follow up meetings with RP Leads / community representatives
 - Possible meetings with Foundations / other RP partners

Day 4. WEDNESDAY. February 13th, 2019

- AM:
- Lunch: with RP leads to discuss draft of Quality of Life Program
- PM: Develop draft matrix
- Evening / @ 5pm-8: *Community Meeting 2*
 - WELCOME 5 MIN
 - CONFIRMATION/REFINEMENT OF ISSUES AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS (30 MIN)
 - INTRODUCTION OF QUALITY OF LIFE MATRIX WITH UNFILLED IN BOXES (10 MIN)
 - DINNER BREAK 1W TIME TO CONTINUE TO FILL OUT MAPS 30 MIN
 - BREAKOUT MEETINGS BY CATEGORY BUT BY BARRIO? TO GET ISSUES, REVIEW STRATEGY SUGGESTIONS, AND GET PROJECT IDEAS FILLED IN] (45 MINUES)
 - BREAK 10 MINUES
 - REPORT BACK SESSION (30 MINUTES)
 - CONCLUSIONS (15 MINUTES)
 - Presentation of draft Quality of Life Program at *Community Meeting 2*.
 - Refinement and presentation of draft Quality of Life Program Matrix for presentation and review by broader meeting of community leaders and stakeholders.

Day 5. THURSDAY. February 14th, 2019

- AM: Program refinement and presentation for *Community Meeting 3*.
- Lunch: Working lunch
- PM: setup of community meeting
- Evening / @ 5pm: *Community Meeting 3*
 - Welcome and agenda 10 minutes
 - Review of draft quality of life proposals in matrix form (initial strategies and projects and responsible parties that LAI and RP staff have learned. Questions of LAI personnel to community 30 minutes
 - Dinner and discussion of LAI questions 30 minutes
 - Breakouts by Barrio or category to discuss how proposals help or don't help local concerns, refinement of draft strategies and project ideas, identification of possible project responsibility 45 minutes
 - Report back 30 minutes
 - Summary of directions given to LAI and RP staff 30 minutes
 -
 - Expansion and refinement of program matrix to reflect additional project suggestions and ideas to ensure input from *Community Meeting 2*.
 - Materials to be organized to facilitate prioritizing of actions and achieving initial sanction from attendees at a broadly advertised community meeting open to all.

Day 6. FRIDAY. February 15th, 2019

- Work day to structure an outline presentation document for review by community leadership and to guide preparation of LAI LEW PAD Workshop on May 1, 2019.
- Community Leadership meeting held 4-6PM
- Proposed program 30 min
- Discussion 60 min
- Agreement on refinement and May 1 meeting structure 30 min

Day 7. SATURDAY. February 16th, 2019

Possible Saturday morning working meeting with RP staff and key leadership

Day 8. SUNDAY. February 17th, 2019

Departure

APPENDIX 2

Land Economics Weekend – LEW PAD Workshop

The PAD Workshop, scheduled for Wednesday, May 1, is intended to encourage interested LAI members to participate in suggesting refinements to the draft of the Río Piedras Quality of Life Program, specifically to address actions to initiate and achieve three key projects identified in the plan:

- 1) Housing Improvement and retenanting
- 2) Improvement of Ponce de León corridor
- 3) Redevelopment of Miligrosa site

The program suggested below is designed to facilitate such participation:

PAD Workshop Schedule

8AM	Depart Marriott by bus to Río Piedras. Community briefing to be provided during bus tour. Buses to continue into the Barrios of the community, with guides pointing out the key features and challenges of each area. Identify three key projects: Housing Redevelopment, Avenida Ponce de León Improvement and Milagrosa Redevelopment.
9:00	Disembark buses at corner of Avenida Ponce de León and the Paseo. Walk through the Paseo to Milagrosa and the Mercado. Tour the Milagrosa site. Walk back along Ponce de León Street to arrive at Casa Ruth.
10:30	Present Quality of Life Plan. Discuss how key projects fit into Quality of Life Plan.
Noon	Discuss and recommend redevelopment project ideas during a working lunch at Casa Ruth.
1:00	Convene breakout sessions organized by strategic area to discuss and develop action implementation plans and identify financing opportunities: <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Avenida Ponce de Leónb. Milagrosa Redevelopmentc. Housing Redevelopment

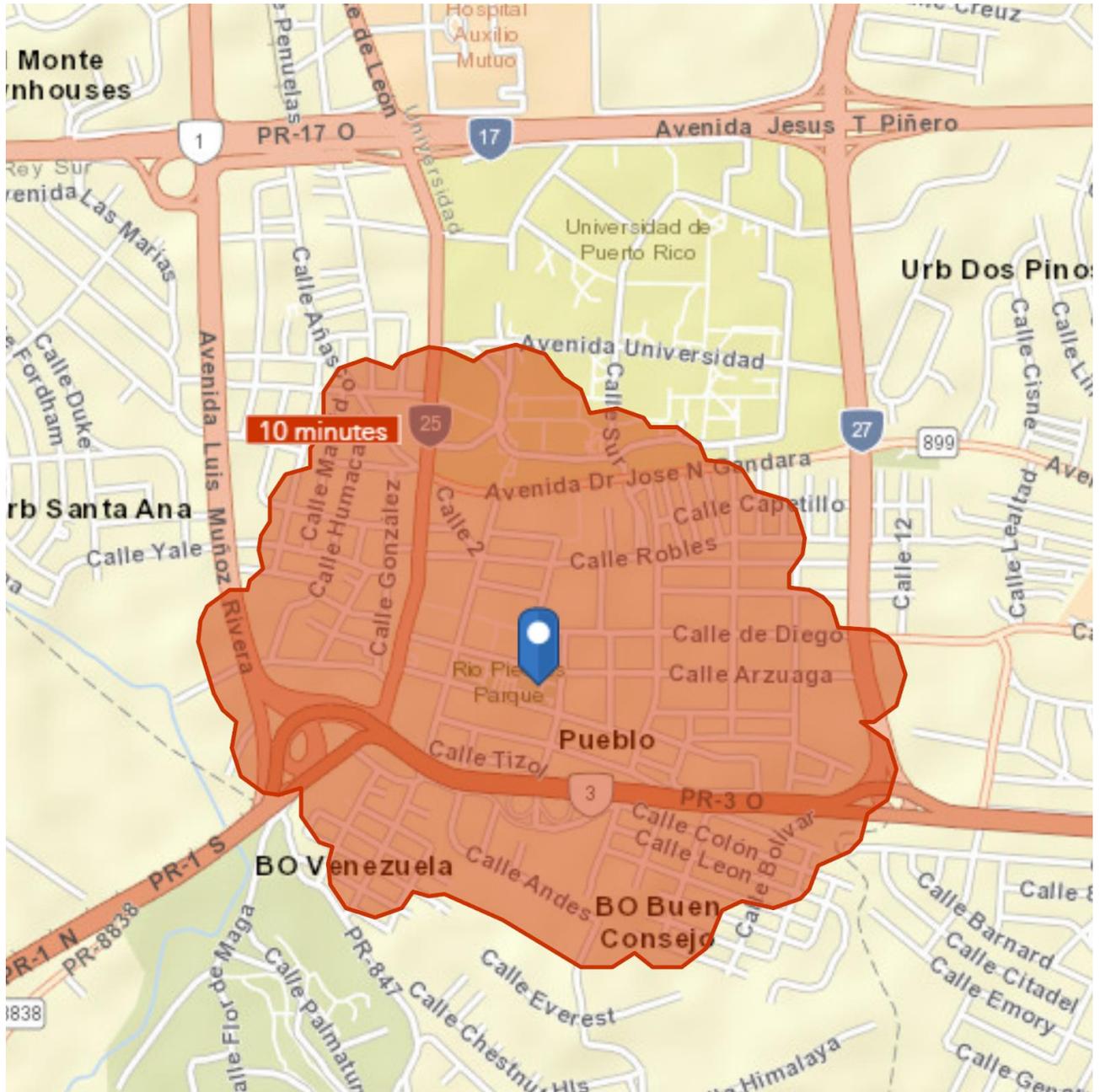
- 2:00 Report summary implementation and financing recommendations
- 2:30 Prepare a work program to guide the Trust in its implementation
- 3:00 Present closing summation
- 3:15 Return by bus to Marriott

APPENDIX 3

TEN MINUTE WALK DATA FROM RIO PIEDRAS COMMERCIAL CENTER

Source ESRI

The data below was graciously provided by LAI member Larry Lund





Puerto Rico Summary Report

Rio Piedras, San Juan
Walk Time: 10 minute radii

Prepared by Esri
Latitude: 18.39745
Longitude: -66.04989



10 minutes

2016 Population Totals	
Total Population	5,395
Population Density (per sq. km)	4,007.1
Population Per Mill	1.5
Total Population Age 0-14	681
Total Population Age 15-29	1,334
Total Population Age 30-44	1,134
Total Population Age 45-59	1,036
Total Population Age 60+	1,210
2016 Male Population Totals	
Total Male Population	2,640
Male Population Age 0-14	303
Male Population Age 15-29	698
Male Population Age 30-44	606
Male Population Age 45-59	543
Male Population Age 60+	491
2016 Female Population Totals	
Total Female Population	2,755
Female Population Age 0-14	378
Female Population Age 15-29	636
Female Population Age 30-44	528
Female Population Age 45-59	493
Female Population Age 60+	720
2016 Household Totals	
Total Households	2,153
Average Household Size	2.5
2016 Households by Income	
Households Income: 1st Quintile	473
Households Income: 2nd Quintile	487
Households Income: 3rd Quintile	422
Households Income: 4th Quintile	390
Households Income: 5th Quintile	380
2016 Households by Type	
Household Type: Family - Married Couple	454
Household Type: Single Male Householder	156
Household Type: Single Female Householder	459
Household Type: Non-family	1,084
2016 Marital Status	
Marital Status: Single	3,055
Marital Status: Married	1,280
Marital Status: Divorced	688
Marital Status: Widowed	372

Data Note: The Population per Mill equals the population in the trade area divided by the total population in the country multiplied by 1,000. Purchasing Power describes the disposable income (income without taxes and social security contributions, including received transfer payments) and is shown in the country's currency. The Purchasing Power per Mill equals the purchasing power in the trade area divided by the total purchasing power in the country multiplied by 1,000.

Source: Esri, MBR

May 18, 2019



Puerto Rico Summary Report

Rio Piedras, San Juan
Walk Time: 10 minute radii

Prepared by Esri
Latitude: 18.39745
Longitude: -66.04989

	10 minutes
2016 Population Age 25+ by Education	
Population by Education: Less Than 9th Grade	846
Population by Education: 9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma	420
Population by Education: High School Graduate/Equivalent	763
Population by Education: Some College, No Degree	453
Population by Education: Associate Degree	324
Population by Education: Bachelor's Degree	624
Population by Education: Graduate or Professional Degree	395
2015 Unemployment	
Unemployed Population	448
2016 Purchasing Power	
Purchasing Power: Total	\$89,872,889
Purchasing Power: Per Mill	1.6
Purchasing Power: Per Capita	\$16,658.55
Purchasing Power: Index	111

Data Note: The Population per Mill equals the population in the trade area divided by the total population in the country multiplied by 1,000. Purchasing Power describes the disposable income (income without taxes and social security contributions, including received transfer payments) and is shown in the country's currency. The Purchasing Power per Mill equals the purchasing power in the trade area divided by the total purchasing power in the country multiplied by 1,000.

Source: Esri, MBR

May 18, 2019

APPENDIX 4

SWOT ANALYSIS

The materials on the following pages, provided in Spanish, summarize a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) undertaken by urban planning students of the University of Puerto Rico, Graduate Urban Planning Program, as part of an analysis of Río Piedras.

STRENGTHS

Fortalezas



- Infraestructura metropolitana: fácil acceso
- Alto porcentaje de aceras en buenas condiciones o aceptables (Casco Urbano, 2012, 70+%)
- Alto porcentaje de estructuras (edificios) con 2 pisos o más (Casco Urbano, 2012, +%)
- Alto porcentaje de estructuras (edificios) en buenas condiciones o aceptables (Casco Urbano, 2012, 50+%)
- Alto porcentaje de actividades en horarios nocturnos (Casco Urbano, 2012, 63%)
- Diversidad de Usos Permitidos (Residencial, Comercial, Mixtos, Público, Carreteras, Escuelas, Tren Urbano, Hospital)
- Alto Valor Histórico y arquitectónico en Estructuras (Edificios)
- Disponibilidad de estructuras (Edificios) para usos culturales y otros
- Compromiso de Grupos Comunitarios
- Mobiliario Urbano
- Infraestructura de Transportación Colectiva
- Universidad e Instituciones Educativas con Valor Social
- Centralidad Geográfica
- Sentido de Pueblo o "down town" o "main square"
- Acceso al Tren Urbano, AMA y peatonal
- Cultura de peatonalidad de Trabajadores y Residentes
- Presencia Trolley (Nocturno)
- Principales Vías de Comunicación

WEAKNESSES

Debilidades



- Alto porcentaje de estructuras (edificios) en condiciones deterioradas, pésimas o inoperante. (Casco Urbano, 2012, 40+%)
- Bajo porcentaje de actividades en horarios diurnos. (Casco Urbano, 2012, 10%)
- Discontinuidad de las Paredes Urbanas y Fachadas
- Presencia Densa de Personas Sin Hogar
- Estado Inoperante de Espacios Claves (Plazas, paseo de Diego, ...)
- Situación Sanitaria
- Gran Cantidad de Animales Realengos
- Lenguaje urbano en deterioro: estructuras abandonadas y vandalizadas
- falta de infraestructura ciclista
- falta de conexión con los parques (jardín botánico)
- Disminución de población en fines de semana y temporada de verano.
- Desaprovecho Oportunidades Turísticas
- Sistema de Alcantarillado Sanitario Antiguo
- Alcantarillado Pluvial Ataponado
- Sub utilización de estacionamientos fuera de la calle
- Desplazamiento de los usos residenciales hacia los bordes del Casco Urbano
- Contaminación sonora (ruido)
- Escasez de áreas verdes y falta de conexión de las existentes
- Mal estado de aceras y elementos que interrumpen el tránsito peatonal

OPPORTUNITIES

Oportunidades



- Aumento en movilidad
- Aumento en uso de transporte publico
- aumento en uso de bicicleta
- Iniciativas de revitalización: comunitarias, municipales y privadas.
- Desarrollo económico: Nuevos comercios, uso de lotes en desuso.
- Diversidad poblacional: por nacionalidad, rango de edades, estudiantes-pobladores.
- Apoyo legal: Ley 39/2016 de Rio Piedras, Zonas especiales, Rio 2020.
- Estructuras Disponibles
- Alta proporción de residencias vacantes

THREATS

Amenazas



- Pérdida de Identidad
- Carecencia de Sentido de Pertenencia
- Percepción de Inseguridad
- Disminución de Medios de Transportación Colectiva
- Mala imagen del sector: mala percepción a través de redes sociales y medios de comunicación
- Continuidad de Criminalidad
- Comercio Tradicional
- Mal estado de aceras y elementos que interrumpen el tránsito peatonal
- Efectos Negativos de la infraestructura sobre el espacio público

