

Five Points

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She feels her café, also known by some customers as JVB, is a good example of this type of place, which does draw people from around the city, but is also a place for Five Points residents to enjoy as part of their neighborhood.

"We get people from all walks of life in here, and everyone is friendly with each other gets along," she said.

Progress does not come with its share of controversy. In January of 2017, increased parking spots had to be created in the area in order to better handle the business from the increasing number of nightspots and eateries. They include popular spots such as 5 Points Bistro, Love Buzz, and Pershing Inn, the latter of which has been part of the area since 1946, and boasts in its online publicity this Five Points mainstay's atmosphere is so friendly, there "hasn't been a fight in this bar since it was originally opened."

However, the popularity of some of these night spots has caused concern from some Five Points residents, and a tense relationship between some long-time residents and some businesses has been the subject of local news stories, over the growing presence of bars resulting in neighbors having to deal with loud noise and drunken behavior from the patrons.

Five Points has overcome other noise issues in the past, when the Five Points Quiet Zone project was established in 2016, a joint project by the Union Pacific Railroad and the City of El Paso which resulted in trains passing more quietly



The Stevens Building on Piedras is now home to a bakery café and residential lofts.

through the neighborhood.

To help address concerns, Five Points residents had formed the Five Points Neighborhood Association, which consists of more than 60 area residents. This association and others are among those working to make sure Five Points doesn't lose itself amid the growth.

As a board member for the Five Points Development Association, Muñoz said she and other members want to make sure they work for the best interests of both the businesses and the surrounding residents.

Change is inevitable in every community, but it is important to hold onto the soul of the past.

"It's about successfully blending the charm of the old with the new," she said. "You still want to hang onto what people have loved about the area for so many years."

Muñoz wants to make sure the new and growing business community is not only there for their own success, but is a good community partner to the residents, many of whom have been a part of Five Points for years. She recently opened a yoga studio, Onawa, across from the café, and has been happy to see neighborhood residents

of all ages taking advantage of the service.

"I want it to be a resource for the community," she said. "I want people to be able to have a place where they can go and feel welcome in their own neighborhood."

For Muñoz, it is the residents who really make Five Points special.

"Everybody here is very laid back, very real," she said. "No matter the walk of life, no one holds any pretenses. We're all part of the Five Points community, and that by far and wide is what makes us special."

Life Three: An example for the future

Private development is helping to drive the progress in Five Points, but city planners also hope to do their part in the area's future.

Rafa Arellano, a Senior Economic Development Specialist with the City of El Paso, said businesses like the Salt + Honey Bakery Café, located in the nearly century-old Stevens Building on Piedras, have helped to bring a new life to the area for several people. The café is located on the first floor of building, with residential apartment lofts above it.

Asfahani said she had always loved the building, but it had been in poor shape in the past. When it was brought back to life as a multi-use building, she was very happy to take advantage of the chance to be part of its new life.

"I knew I wanted to be in place like this with character, and not be set up in just some strip mall," she said.

Arellano said these types of mixed-use buildings can be beneficial to everyone in a neighborhood.

"We're hoping this type of growth is not only helpful to the retail businesses involved, but also with the residents of the neighborhood," he said.

He said they are looking into more mixed-use buildings that incorporate businesses, including small, locally owned businesses, with residential spaces and safe, walkable areas.

He said the transfer center helps to spur this type of growth, by giving area residents easy access to Sun Metro's buses. This is referred to as Transit-Oriented Development (TOD); a development plan that combines housing with office, retail, and walkable neighborhood area located a short distance from public transportation.

Arellano said the City Council adopted this policy last month, with the idea of offering larger incentives for developments that follow this pattern.

Similar TOD development is being seen in other areas, including Downtown and on the West Side (such as the development at Montecillo). Five Points, he explained, is similar to these.

He said he expects to see more "high density" buildings that make room for mixed use, and encourage people to take advantage of the offerings in their own neighborhood communities.

"We want to create in these areas little 'downtowns,' where people can feel safe walking to and from their homes, to nearby work, shopping and other everyday needs," he explained.

He said people can expect to see more developments like these this year alone. By sustainably bringing more residents into a neighborhood, he explained this gives small businesses more reason to

open their businesses in the neighborhood, which leads to more people shopping, living and working in the area, and more money and improvements going back into that neighborhood. It is an ideal situation for everyone.

While people often talk about the "gentrification" of an area that sometimes describes the arrival of more affluent individuals into an urban community, Arellano said the effort by residents, businesses and city planners regarding Five Points are hoping to not turn the area into a place that lacks the history and character of the historic neighborhood, but that benefits new businesses and longtime residents at the same time.

He did say one of the goals is not to bring exclusively high-end apartments into the area, but also smaller, more affordable loft and apartment spaces. Smaller spaces he said, for example could prove desirable not only for young, single adults and students who want to better budget their disposable income, but also for older people, including "empty nesters" who want a nice living area with less space.

"This is something important to us," he said. "We've encouraged some developers to not include \$2,000 (a month) lofts in their buildings, but create small, more affordable spaces, where people with lower incomes, such as students, will not be discouraged about finding a place to live in the area."

He said the combination of affordable housing with a variety of businesses, and services could have a multigenerational appeal, something that helps make historic neighborhoods like Five Points distinct.

Five Points is also one of various "Heritage Corridor" arches throughout El Paso to receive ornate entrance signs as part of the city's Sun City Lights initiative. This includes arches that mark the entrance of some of El Paso's distinct areas, such as Kern Place, Dyer Street and Scenic Drive. The signage for the Five Points area should be near Wyoming and Piedras.

"These signs will help to 'brand' these areas and let people know when they are in one of the city's unique places," he said.

Arellano said he hopes neighborhood communities like Five Points can serve as an example of how residents and business can support each other, while encouraging people from all over the city to discover the uniqueness of its neighborhoods. This is especially true when encouraging them to use other types of transportation than just their individual vehicles.

"When people walk they get more invested in their surroundings," Arellano said. "When you drive through an area, you don't see all the details. We want people to get out of their vehicles and walk. It is not only healthier, but helps give you a better sense of the community."

Asfahani expects that more and more people will soon discover the area, and she encourages people who haven't been to Five Points in a while to see some of the wonderful places created by local business owners.

She said Five Points is a symbol of how many innovative El Pasoans are changing the way the city is perceived. The pre-conceived notion that other cities have better offerings is beginning to fade away.

"One comment I get a lot is people say 'it isn't even like being in El Paso,'" she said. "Well, things are changing here. This is El Paso now."

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