

# The Museo del Westside

## Becoming a Reality

By Sarah Zenaida Gould,  
Director of San Antonio's Museo del Westside

On Sunday, March 24th community members gathered at *Casa de Cuentos* for our first meeting regarding the design phase of San Antonio's *Museo del Westside* project. The meeting began with an introduction of the team that is working on the reha-

bilitation of the historic *Ruben's Ice House*, that will house the *Museo del Westside*. The design is being headed up by architect Dwayne Bohuslav, who has worked with Esperanza on several previous projects including the rehabilitation of the *Casa de Cuentos* and the *Casita* at the *Rinconcito de Esperanza*. We are thrilled to have Dwayne working with us again as he really understands our ethics and commitment to working with

community. Arturo Vilchis, one of Dwayne's former students and now a professional designer, created the digital drawings of the rehab plan. Arturo is particularly interested in the reuse of older buildings like Ruben's and is a great addition to the team. David Grabitske is our museum consultant. He is co-author of the book *Building Museums: A Handbook for Small and Midsize Organizations*, a book which has been invaluable to me in this process. Finally, the *Museo Advisory Committee* is made up of *Buena Gente* who volunteered to serve on this project along with Esperanza's Executive Director, Graciela I. Sánchez, and myself, Sarah Zenaida Gould, Director of the *Museo del Westside*.

Graciela gave an overview of the history of the *Rinconcito de Esperanza* beginning with our purchase of *Casa de Cuentos* and the *Casita* in 2001 and their rehabilitation, followed by the purchase of *Ruben's Ice House*, formerly owned by Manuel and Elida Reyes, with the blessing of the Reyes children in 2007. Then,

in 2017 we built the new *MujerArtes* studio from compressed earth block – the first of its kind in the Westside in a century!

I then introduced the basic concept of a museum, explaining that most of us associate museums with art, but in fact most museums in the US are history museums. At their core, museums acquire, conserve, research, communicate, and exhibit heritage. Our idea for the *Museo del Westside* is to be a community participatory museum, meaning that we will focus on the local area – the Westside – and invite the community to participate in developing our exhibits and programs.

Bernard Sánchez of the *Museo Advisory Committee* introduced the *Museo's* working mission statement developed by the committee: ***The Museo del Westside is dedicated to preserving and presenting the unique history, heritage, culture, pride, work ethic, and diverse experiences of la gente del Westside of San***

***Antonio, Texas, to increase understanding and appreciation by building and strengthening knowledge of the Westside in order to create a more vibrant future for our community.***

David then gave a brief presentation on what makes a museum building special. He asked which do you think is the biggest challenge for museums? Water, light, or dust? He then explained that ultraviolet (UV) light is one of the most destructive elements in a museum environment—capable of causing permanent and irreversible damage to artifacts and therefore we must create an environment that limits UV light damage. Dust is then the next most damaging element, followed by water. These issues along with maintaining proper temperature and humidity, providing appropriate fire suppression and security and systems, using appropriate materials and maintaining a pest management protocol will provide a safe environment for our guests and the artifacts we display.



Ruben's Ice House was acquired in 2001 and is being renovated as the site for the *Museo del Westside*.

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# Museo del



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This was followed by the unveiling of the preliminary rehabilitation design plan. Dwayne and Arturo walked us through their design drawings. The plan is to preserve as much of the original Ruben's building as possible, and incorporate a new addition to the rear of the existing structure – potentially to be made from compressed earth block to match the *MujerArtes* studio - to allow for more gallery space and collections storage. After the presentation, we exited *Casa de Cuentos* so that Dwayne and Arturo could show us how the existing concrete pad behind Ruben's could be reused and then we went inside Ruben's to see how what is already there will be rehabilitated.

Attendees were given time to ask questions at the meeting, but were also asked to fill out feedback forms so we can do our best to meet the community's expectations. One question that was asked was, will the *Museo* have a perma-

nent collection or only borrow artifacts for display? The answer is, yes, we will have a small permanent collection (small because we don't have unlimited space), and we will accept artifact donations if they fit within the *Museo's* collection scope. We will also borrow artifacts for display as needed. We received a number of ideas for future exhibits, which I've added to a growing list of exhibit ideas that we've been collecting at *Second Saturday Convivios* since last summer. Finally, there was also discussion about creating a landscaping plan for the outdoor areas that will connect all the buildings at the *Rinconcito*. Plants, benches, and a water element were suggested.

The building does pose some challenges to meeting American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements so we are hard at work trying to resolve those issues and hope to have an update on that at the next community meeting (stay tuned for the date!). Because Ruben's Ice House is historic, once the design details are worked out we will need to go to the city's *Historic and Design Review Commission* to get approval and then we will need to get the project priced out. That will tell us how much money we need to raise to fund the rehabilitation. I am really grateful that at the meeting several attendees expressed their willingness to help us with the fundraising phase of the project. I also want to thank the *San Antonio Conservation Society* and *National Trust for Historic Preservation* for helping us fund the hiring of the outside design team members.

Please stay tuned for the announcement of the next *Museo* community meeting!



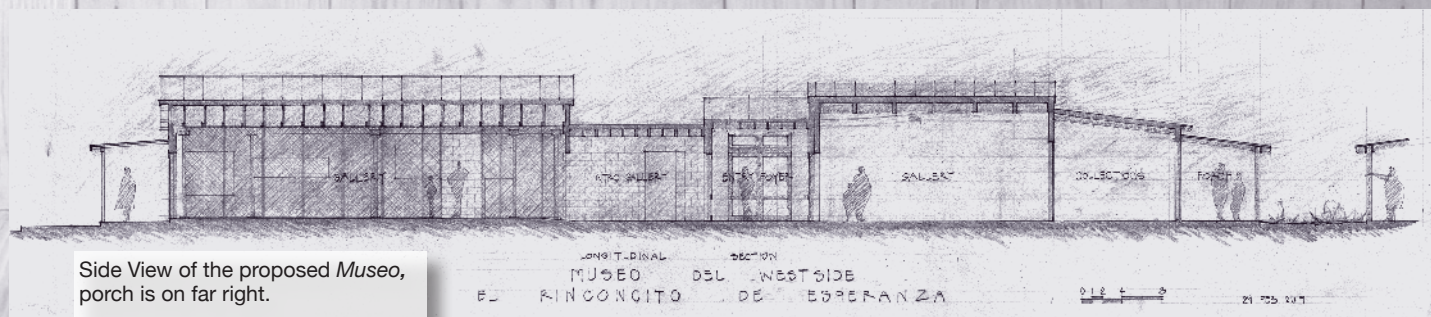
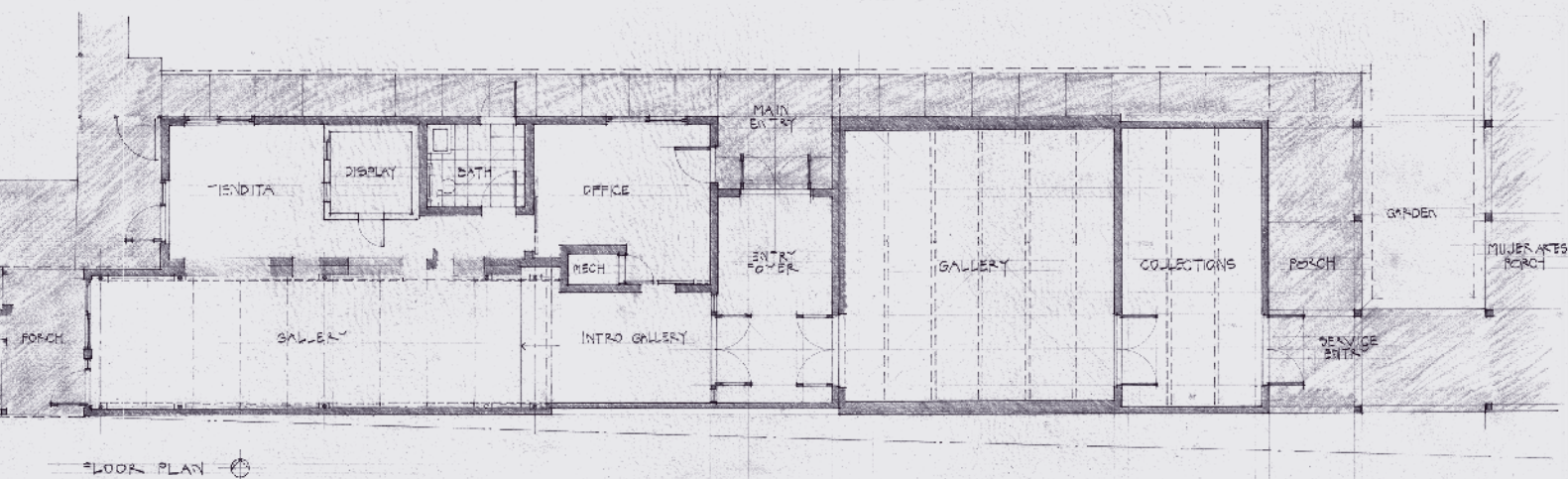
Dwayne Bohuslav, center right, goes over plans inside Ruben's with committee members while Graciela Sánchez takes photos from behind.

Sarah Zenaida Gould, Director of the Museo del Westside, organized an exhibit on the Alazán-Apache Courts.





# Westside



Side View of the proposed Museo, porch is on far right.

Top: Plans show an entrance to the Museo gallery at left with a *tiendita* next to it. Additional exhibition space, an office and collections' space continue towards the back opening to an outdoor garden near *MujerArtes*.

The Museo Advisory Committee met at the *Rinconcito* where Dwayne Bohuslav gave them a history of the four buildings on site.

