

Ciudad Juárez

center gets facelift:

City center to get facelift

Leaders hope changes will improve economy

BY J.E. COLLINSON
The News

MEXICO CITY - The historic center of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, is to undergo significant renovations in a bid to boost the city's economy, representatives of the National Chamber of Commerce said at a press conference Monday.

Supermarkets, boutiques, libraries, cinemas and theaters will be constructed, and walkways and green areas will be developed, in order to make the center more attractive, prosperous and secure, said Ricardo Navarro Benitez, vice president of the coordination of legislative liaison at CONCANACO, the Confederation of the National Chambers of Commerce, Service and Tourism.

The historic center of Ciudad Juárez is fundamental for tourism, but like all historic centers has been worn down by the passage of time. The refurbishment of the area, covering 240 blocks between Avenue 16th of September and the Río Bravo will generate 300,000 new jobs, while creating a new image for the city and driving the economy through development of business and tourism, he said.

So far, 50 million pesos (\$3.3 million) of public and private funds has

been invested in buying up areas of central Juárez, and the municipal government is now inviting entrepreneurs to present plans for developing the area.

"The project has been in the pipeline for 10 years, and the government started constructions in 2013. However, we need the participation of the private sector to ensure the sustainability of the project," said Enrique Serrano Escobar, municipal president of Ciudad Juárez.

Ciudad Juárez has long struggled with violence, and from 2008 to 2010 had the highest homicide rate of any city in the world, according to the Mexican think-tank, Citizens Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice.

"For many years, people spoke very badly of the city, and with reason," said Serrano Escobar.

"From 2006 to 2010, Juárez lived through a true winter, and only those who lived there can really explain what they passed through. There were 10 murders per day, over 7,000 businesses were being extorted, and once there were 10 kidnappings in a single day.

"Now, the murder rate is down to between 20 to 30 a month, which is still too high, but is largely confined

to criminal groups. Vehicle theft is down significantly, and the city has gone 20 months without a single kidnapping," he said.

The redevelopment of the historic center should further improve conditions in the city, he said. Micro-businesses have been reopening, new small- and medium-enterprises are growing, and the number of self-service stores is increasing.

"For every seven jobs created in Ciudad Juárez, only one is created in El Paso, Texas," he added.

"Given the state of insecurity that existed up until 2010, it will be difficult to recuperate tourism. The news was international, and obviously reached nearby cities such as El Paso and others. People were terrified of going to Ciudad Juárez, and this has been very difficult to address.

"However, we have been working on the causes of the problems, and have gone a long way to resolve them, generating better security in public spaces. Little by little, people are realizing this, and now, you often see vehicles in commercial centers with license plates from Texas," he said.



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Representatives from the National Chamber of Commerce say the renovations will help Ciudad Juarez.