



My Turn

A dozen wasted efforts?

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Did you know that Taos has a dozen separate groups of citizens and public officials working independently on “economic development?”

Twelve separate sets of individuals who are without a doubt committed to the economic future of our region, but for some reason have all been set up over time to serve the mission of economic development independently from one another.

You’d think that with all these boards, committees, commissions and groups our economy would be thriving. Not so. In fact, Taos’ economy has been in a virtually uninterrupted economic slide for almost five years I don’t believe in the concept of economic stagnation — there is no such thing as flat growth. We’re either growing or shrinking. Right now, we’re slowly shrinking.

In my opinion, the days are long gone when Taos could support 12 different groups independently promoting economic development. It’s time that we all sat down together — and soon — to figure out how we can communicate, cooperate and consolidate our efforts. It’s time for the leadership of our community to set aside differences and lead.

Luckily, the two biggest economic development players, the town and the county, are aware that the time has come for change in our old ways of thinking. In the days of plenty, each government could operate independently and could separately finance many standard functions of government such as fleet maintenance. Our Town and County Fathers now see that this represents a structural flaw that cannot be sustained over time.

Although citizens throughout the county obtain the benefits of many town services, they pay nothing for those services — only the town of Taos is responsible for the library, for example. And what of 911 and other emergency services that are financed disproportionately by the Town? This, too, represents a structural flaw in our thinking.

The airport is a perfect example of the disparity created by lack of consolidated efforts: Why would the town finance any expansion of the airport when only the county government would show a direct financial benefit? The town now wants to annex the airport property. By doing so, both the town and the county could realize significant financial rewards through infrastructure development.

On the non-governmental side are 10 community groups competing against one another for an increasingly tiny portion of a very small pie.

Frankly, as the local economy continues to shrink, only the Taos Entrepreneurial Network (TEN) seems to have avoided doing less and less with less and less. One of the critical components of TEN's success has been its fundamental willingness to communicate and cooperate with disparate groups. But even that group sees that its mission is being transformed by the financial realities of changing fiscal priorities.

As our governmental entities begin to work together it is time for our private economic development groups to do the same. To achieve this we have to overcome some old obstacles: First, each group must come to the table ready to surrender ownership of its niche. No one group owns any part of this problem and no one group is going to solve what took years to create.

Second, each group and each individual member of that group must surrender their historic unwillingness to work directly with the other players in our community. As a merchant in the Historic District and as a member of the Taos County Chamber of Commerce, I have to admit my personal preference is for the board I chair, but I also understand that I have no ownership of any group or idea and that we're never going to fix what's broken until we shake hands, sit down together and recognize that we have a rare opportunity to act now.

My opinion is that we have 12 wasted efforts because we're not communicating, cooperating and consolidating our precious resources. It's time to sit down at the same table and find out where our well-intentioned, but separate and diffused efforts can be brought to bear.

Here's the good part: none of this criticism, none of this handwringing about how bad things have become, has anything to do with the potential we all possess when we agree to actually act together. The future still possesses the unlimited potential of creation.

In the coming weeks, we're going to call just such a meeting using a guided discussion format in the Taos County Chamber of Commerce Chairman's Table. We'll get the word out via e-mail, so if you're not already on the Chamber's E-mail list, please contact us and we'll send you a notice. Hope to see you there!

Brad Malone is the chairman of the board of the Taos County Chamber of Commerce; he writes that this op-ed piece is not being submitted on behalf of the Chamber.

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