



Arts, culture group solicits ideas on downtown

By J.R. Logan

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Interested in seeing more grass on the Plaza? Got an idea on how to reduce gridlock on Paseo del Pueblo? Any suggestions on events to draw more people to the heart of Taos?

The Taos Arts and Cultural District is asking businesses and residents for advice on how to improve the town's downtown area. The organization says it is putting together the final pieces in order to get funding to make these ideas a reality.

"I don't care what visitor's think right now, I want the locals to love it again," said Cindy Spray, director of the Arts and Cultural District.

If downtown is somewhere Taosenos want to visit, then visitors will naturally follow, she says.

For years, various organizations have been soliciting advice from the community on how to revitalize the downtown area. An intensive, week-long planning process in 2010 led to a comprehensive proposal that included ambitious renovations to the Plaza and the surrounding side streets.

Spray said her organization and other groups have been working on smaller projects — like downtown beautification, grant writing for the old courthouse and staffing at the Plaza visitors kiosk — but intends to see the ideas from the 2010 session realized.

"It's not that this got dropped, it's that we need money," Spray says.

To get that funding, Spray said Taos Arts and Cultural District is helping the town to develop a Downtown Master Plan — a requirement before state capital outlay funds would be made available for infrastructure work.

As a part of preparing the downtown plan, Spray said there will be a series of meetings aimed at collecting additional ideas and suggestions from the public.

Taos Town Councilor Fred Peralta said the purpose of the plan is to come up with a prioritized list of specific projects so the town can turnaround and get funding.

"We've got to get into the specifics so we can put a price tag on it," Peralta said.

The town relies almost entirely on gross receipts taxes, meaning it is in better financial shape when businesses are doing better. While Peralta acknowledged that the town is looking at ways to diversify the local economy beyond tourism, visitor traffic and the businesses that serve them remain a primary economic driver. Peralta noted that the town and shop owners need to work together to make downtown a thriving center of business.

“It’s a partnership,” Peralta said. “The town can’t do it all and the businesses can’t do it all. But if we work together, then we can get it done.”

The timing of the Downtown Master Plan coincides with efforts by Taos County to get \$500,000 for structural improvements at the Old County Courthouse. The county has long identified the building as an “anchor” for revitalization of the Plaza, and many have suggested that it be used as a museum and visitors center.

The Taos Arts and Cultural District — which is an offshoot of the state’s Main Street program — has been working to bring together community groups like Los Jardineros, the Taos Project, the Rotary Club and representatives of Taos Pueblo to bring new ideas and events downtown.

About 70 people are also expected to come to Taos in July to attend a New Mexico Coalition of MainStreet Communities conference.

Meetings related to the Downtown Master Plan are expected to begin in the coming weeks. For more information, contact Spray at (575) 770-2531.



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The Taos Arts and Cultural District is soliciting comments from the public on ideas to improve the downtown area. The district is helping the town of Taos put together a plan of specific projects that could be funded with capital outlay money from the state.