



THE TAOS NEWS

Best U.S. Weekly Paper- NNA 2007, 2008, 2010
Inland Press Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

Editorial

Water outage draws attention to town's infrastructure needs

The Taos News, 10/2/2014

Most people in town went without water from the evening of Sept. 18 until the next morning. Faucets were dry. Toilets didn't flush. It was enough of a problem schools and local governments closed for the day. Businesses that depended on water couldn't operate. The town's Public Works Department worked through the night to fix a waterline break beneath Cruz Alta Road and other leaks. But the water outage reveals a huge issue: the town's infrastructure needs serious attention.

We understand deferring maintenance, on say, water lines and roads, is often a fact of life during hard times. There is only so much money to go around, as we saw in the most recent recession.

So we give the new administration credit for recognizing the town's infrastructure — including its aging water system — needs work.

A week before the outage, Town Council approved a five-year capital projects plan totaling almost \$60 million. The plan contains \$2.5 million for the water system during the first year.

Part of that work would update valves that control water pressure for much of the town's system.

The town got a big grant from the state to do millions worth of improvements. But that money, which hasn't been fully spent, is for problems that were identified seven years ago.

With infrastructure aging and failing, there's going to be a lot more need. And where's the money for the repairs? That's the 60-million-dollar question.

The town certainly can't expect much from the Legislature. Last year it got \$230,000. It missed out on a half-million federal block grant because it hadn't completed a project with a previous grant.

So the town is looking for a grant writer who will miraculously find money.

Perhaps the town also needs to lighten its load a bit by calling on the county to help pay for town services that benefit the region, say the library and Taos Youth and Family Center.

Certainly it is a lot to ask a town of 5,000 or so residents to shoulder the costs for the rest of the county.

Yes, the Crdova administration tried that with the library, but its strong-armed approach only added to the strained relations between town and county. A more reasonable approach might work.

The town also owns 69 insured structures. Some it uses, others it leases to community groups. Perhaps it is time for the town to decide which buildings are worth owning and maintaining, and which should be sold.

While there aren't any easy solutions for fixing the town's infrastructure problems, we commend officials for recognizing they exist and coming up with a plan.

What should happen now is a hard review of what the town can and can't afford. It will need a concerted effort and a reduction in unnecessary expenses to find money for basic infrastructure like water service.

That's a solid start.