



THE TAOS NEWS

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Editorial

Town's numerous properties a building burden

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Plain and simple: the town of Taos owns too many buildings. As a story in last week's edition noted, the town owns 83 structures, including such items as the Plaza gazebo. Then, there are 69 buildings. Many are obviously useful to the town such as Town Hall, where most of its government does business. Other buildings are technically owned by the town but used by local nonprofits, which take care of building expenses but pay no cash rent to the town.

Then, there is the Mary Medina Building on Gusdorf Road, which the state officially deeded to the town in 2013. It was supposed to house a new police station. Instead the empty building is a magnet for vandals and thieves.

So how did the town get in this mess? Obviously, when times were good, it could afford to be generous — or feel like it could take on more structures.

But that hasn't been the case in a long while.

The town spends \$62,000 on insurance and a whopping \$650,000 on utilities annually towards its buildings. Then, there is maintenance, which hasn't got a lot of attention lately, and costly replacements. Roofs especially.

We know this problem took many years to develop but it is one the current administration cannot ignore. The town needs to come up with a plan and implement it. Current leaders know this. We'd like to see real action.

Our first suggestion is the town should give back the Mary Medina Building to the state. Or get permission to sell it or find someone willing to take it on. Or tear it down. For the town, it's nothing but a liability.

The town made a smart move a couple of years ago when it located the police department to Town Hall. Now, we say sell the building it once shared with dispatch on a prime location on Civic Plaza Drive.

(Town officials must be relieved UNM-Taos is leasing two buildings for a downtown campus, with hopes to buy them outright.) What other buildings could be divested? Yes, the state's anti-donation clause prevents the town from giving buildings away outright, but not from being sold.

We also believe the town and county should have a serious but friendly discussion about sharing responsibility for those services and buildings that are townowned but benefit county residents things like the library and recreation center.

The town should seriously weigh whether it can take on new building projects before it takes care of the buildings that already need some TLC.

For example, the last administration claimed the Eco-Park on Salazar Road would draw athletes to Taos for high-altitude training. But that grand plan has stalled because for months the town couldn't afford to construct locker rooms.

The new town administration has promised creative thinking and real action. We think addressing the bloated building inventory is a great place to start.