



THE TAOS NEWS

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Editorial

Let's keep the plaza momentum going

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Maybe the biggest shock we got this Halloween was the incredible turnout for the trick or treat event on Taos Plaza last Friday (Oct. 31).

The plaza and adjacent streets were packed with locals who came out in droves with costumed kids to mingle downtown with friends and neighbors.

This was only the latest in a series of events that successfully brought Taos back to the center of town. We hope it's a pattern that continues.

Since the beginning of the summer, the plaza has been abuzz with activity, including the weekly farmers market, a free concert that drew thousands, and now a community Halloween party.

The irony of this success is that it hasn't required a million-dollar plan, fancy architectural renderings or a series of forums to gather input and take suggestions.

Instead, all it took were town officials who didn't cave to a minority of angry merchants.

The town announced in early summer it was moving Taos Farmers Market to the plaza. A familiar chorus of plaza merchants voiced outrage at the suggestion, arguing traffic from the market would kill their business. But the resounding approval from the community at large gave town councilors the gumption to keep the market where it was.

Similarly, the town's investment in a free concert by the band Kongos just before the opening of the Fall Arts Festival once again proved that people — locals and visitors alike — will come to the plaza as long as something is happening.

We urge the town council to keep the momentum going.

For too long, the plaza has been little more than a lonely parking lot in the center of town. Most locals avoided it like the plague, and plenty of tourists were turned off by the dead vibe.

That's slowly changing, and for the better.

We're sympathetic to some of the concerns of plaza merchants. A few store owners continue to insist their sales are suffering because of the more frequent events. In a survey, one shopkeeper showed in dollars and cents exactly how much her sales had dropped since the farmers market took over Saturday mornings.

But in the long run, we think a stronger, more vibrant downtown will benefit the local economy as a whole, including these merchants. Visitors like action. Character. Something to do. These events are exiting and interesting, and they show off one of Taos' strongest assets — its eclectic and eccentric cast of characters.

For locals, we think these events in the heart of town build a stronger sense of community in a place that's had its share of cultural strife and social fragmentation.

All this is not to say the plaza couldn't use a facelift. And never has the town been in a better position to find the money to make improvements.

Mayor Barrone's administration has shown it can bring people back to the plaza. If the town dusts off existing plans for plaza improvements, that should grease the wheels for grant money to really make the plaza inviting.

At the top of our wish list — fewer bricks and more grass. The existing hardscape with chain barriers and awkward steps make the plaza seem like an obstacle course.

Also, the success of these recent events has highlighted the need to come up with a real solution to parking and traffic in the historic district. Building permanent public bathrooms not housed in a trailer would be a nice touch too.

There has been plenty of lip service that these issues are being looked at, but we've yet to see much action. Resolving those problems will go a long way in appeasing the merchants who most oppose the downtown activity and make going downtown easier for everyone.

We give credit to Mayor Barrone's administration for making good on a promise to bring life back to the plaza. Now we'd like to see them take the ball and run with it.