



THE TAOS NEWS

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

My Turn

We need to revisit the Eco Park

Harvey Blaustein

The Taos News, 11/6/2014

I need to start with a disclosure. My cousin, Joel Israel, was one of the originators of the Taos Eco Park plan.

I had nothing to do with his hiring, though, nor with his vision, as it developed. With that out of the way, let's get to the merits.

Since the start of the Great Recession, the Taos economy has changed radically. Art buyers no longer purchase at past levels. That, real estate, and tourism were our three big industries. This town needs to look forward, seek other income streams, and decide who and what we are, if we are no longer a major art market.

(Real estate has fared poorly as well, which you probably know.) When the Eco Park was envisioned, it was to be three fields so tournaments could be played. One can't have more than a game or an exhibition with just one. The idea was to put us on the map with a field that was special and then build two others that served the purpose. A lot of money went into building the FIFA 2 Star field, one of only four in the country and the one at the highest elevation.

At the grand opening, the then office-holders were tripping over each other trying to take credit. I was there and remember the promises made by our then Mayor and most of the council. But when the cameras went away, so did the promises, and nothing else happened.

What we now have is the most expensive recreational soccer field in the country.

Not something we need. The priorities changed by the then elected officials and no more was heard about the other two fields and the original vision.

But let's go back to that for a minute. Imagine having a place where high school and college teams could compete. Imagine a place where teams could practice in our great weather knowing that they were building their lungs working out at this elevation.

Imagine a place where cheerleading teams and others needing outdoor space could come, knowing the chances of being rained out were minimal.

Then, think about the hotels they would need to stay in, the meals they and their followers, family and friends would eat in our restaurants and the money they would spend on gasoline. And maybe some of those folks would want to bring back a souvenir or two, a remembrance of

a good time had. That is what we were all thinking at the time. But then it was all shut down except for an occasional game on our one spiffy field.

It is time to make the original vision a priority. It is time that we invested in our future and sought new revenue streams that could make a difference in our world. The first steps have been taken but now the Town needs to put this back on track and realize the potential. This can still be a special place that becomes important to our future. Leaving things as they are is unacceptable because it makes no sense. While the current mayor and council did not create this situation they sure can make things better. It is a matter of priorities and I say our future has to be important.

The status quo is just unacceptable. I don't know about you but every time I drive on Salazar Road and pass that field standing empty and sad, I think about the waste of money and ideas if we don't complete what we started. I for one believe that we need political courage, we need folks willing to think outside the box, and we need to take risks for rewards.

We can become a sports town, one that draws folks from the surrounding states to this paradise. There is no pollution that comes with running and playing. There is no need to expand our infrastructure or change anything else about the way we live and work. Heck, it seems a natural considering our climate and sunshine, the lack of rain and the fresh clean air we are blessed with.

I hope to start a dialogue.

I hope to start a movement. I hope to get the Eco Park back in our thinking and then finish what was started. We need new revenue streams more than ever and here is one just waiting to be born.

Harvey Blaustein, a real estate agent, is a Taos resident.