

My Turn

Give change a chance

Diane Enright

The Taos News, 12/11/2014

As a resident of Taos for over 40 years I have had the opportunity to observe the airport saga continue for going on three decades. I have been a Realtor here since 1981 and in the 1991-92 era I was opposed to the improvement of the airport.

I had been to Vail so I knew that the argument that Taos would turn into another Vail or Aspen was unfounded. However, I did naively buy into the rhetoric of the time that changing the airport would change Taos and I liked Taos the way it was.

In 1991, Taos was one of the poorest counties in 48th poorest state in the union. In 2014, Taos is one of the poorest counties in the 48th poorest state in the union. Isn't it time for a change?

Taos prides itself in its ethnic diversity. As a community, I don't feel we can just maintain the status quo. Look where that's gotten us — nowhere.

We need more economic diversity to thrive as a vibrant, progressive community or we will have more Walmarts and Family Dollars replacing more small businesses instead of attracting those businesses that might provide higher wages and more exciting opportunities. How many of our children, some of whose families have been here for generations, have to leave to find meaningful work? The rest of the world is changing at warp speed. We can't continue to live in 1891 or 1991.

I respect the very vocal Taose-os who oppose the addition of the crosswind runway because I know they are sincere in their beliefs but the idea that we have to choose between having a safer airport with the additional runway over preserving farmland and acequias seems extremely short-sighted and alarmist. The idea that developers are lined up to come here and build huge subdivisions is also alarmist.

Our last real estate boom in land sales was just before the state subdivision law changed.

That was what pushed prices up. Realtors can only market land, the owners are the sellers and unfortunately they often sell because their children do not want to take care of the acequias or farm the land. There are hundreds of acres of irrigated farm land in Taos County that are not being utilized. Land sales are down about 75 percent from 2005 and even the expansion of the airport won't bring that back to a "boom" status.

What if all the time, energy, and attorney fees spent challenging the airport could be used to support organizations like Taos Land Trust, Rivers and Birds, and Amigos Bravos? Over 25,000 acres of irrigated farmland and wildlife habitat have been preserved forever in conservation easements with the Taos Land Trust.

Some people who have placed their land in conservation easements are wealthy, some farmers, and some just those concerned for the land.

What if we stopped labeling people as “wealthy,” “poor,” “local,” “middle class,” “young,” “old” or God forbid, “Realtors,” and agreed to disagree sensibly and work together to make this a better community even if it means a little change.

So much of what I’ve heard/ read has involved fear — even fear of the military. Osprey helicopters hovering overhead?

Really? Since when do they need a runway?

The airport expansion is just for the wealthy? Even many local pilots aren’t wealthy and the majority of people who fly commercial aren’t wealthy; they are just visiting parents or grandchildren, vacationing or doing business. We all need to come back down to earth, take a breath, and see what we can do to come together. After all, we’re not talking about building DFW; it’s just one crosswind runway.

Diane Enright is a longtime Taos resident and real estate agent.