

## My Turn

### Issues for council candidates to consider

Polly Raye

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The Mayor is quoted as saying: The challenge for the town is “finding locations where interested businesses can move into our community supporting sorely needed gross receipts tax revenue.”

But wait — the beautiful new Smith’s will replace the old. Will we spend more on groceries just because the store is newer?

Now we’ve learned that Smith’s wants to take over residential land to build numerous new shops. Do we need more shops downtown more than we need more homes?

Most important, are new retail businesses from outside the community our biggest or best source of increased GRT?

Currently there are 250-300 small, locally owned businesses in the historic district of Taos but only 600 public parking spaces. That is not nearly enough parking for those businesses to grow and flourish. With increased convenient parking, most of those businesses could increase their sales by 2-300 percent within three-five years, and continue to grow from there. I would argue this represents sustainable, reliable, long-term GRT growth.

The earnings of the 250300 local business owners and their employees would increase. They already buy locally for their businesses .... insurance, advertising, bookkeeping, legal, banking, landscaping & repairs, etc. (Non-local businesses often don’t buy these services locally.) As their incomes increase these business owners and their employees will spend more on their homes and families as well as on restaurants, recreation and a more comfortable lifestyle — further supporting our local economy.

The data show that every dollar spent at a local business re-circulates seven times in our local economy, while the earnings of out-of-town firms literally leave town.

Independent business owners are also the backbone of community support (time and donations) for schools, sports teams, and the many nonprofits that make our community a better place to live. There is something big happening in Taos that needs to be discussed along with the re-zoning proposal: The redesign of Paseo del Sur and Norte. The town has received \$11 million from the state and is quietly planning this re-design. This is a big project surrounded in secrecy. Why should the public care? Because the way traffic moves through town is critical to the success of local businesses.

The best idea to come out of 30 years of discussions is this: Build a partially underground parking garage at the location of Tuesday Morning. Why? Three levels wouldn't block the view of Taos Mountain from the south. The property backs up to the Plaza. A walkway already exists to McCarthy Plaza. It could be beautiful and at the same grade as the Plaza. Most importantly, this garage would solve a large part of the traffic problem in town. Most visitors arrive from the south, either from Santa Fe or from the numerous hotels south of town. As they approach the Plaza, there is no obvious, visible place to park, so they continue to the busy "Plaza traffic light," adding to the congestion.

Engineers hired by the town some years ago reported that during tourist seasons (the only times we have significant traffic jams) 30 percent of the traffic in the historic district is people looking for a place to park. Both tourists and locals now avoid the historic district when the traffic is backed up.

With a parking garage at the Tuesday Morning location, a big sign at the Paseo/ Placitas/Quesnel intersection could announce: PLAZA AREA PARKING. All those tourists (plus a lot of locals) would turn into the garage thus getting off Paseo before they reach the Plaza light. We could reduce traffic at that light by 30 percent. This alone could solve the downtown traffic problem.

There would be no need for the unpopular and expensive "one way street" plan currently being pushed by the state highway department.

A plan for this garage almost passed the town council about 25 years ago, but it was killed by "politics." Unfortunate for the town of Taos. This was around the time the Santa Fe city government built its plaza-area parking garages and lots. Not coincidentally, this is when Santa Fe's Plaza became more vibrant than ours and their tourism industry began to boom, while that of Taos started to fade. Taos' former planning director, Allen Vigil, told me Santa Fe's increased GRT paid for the parking infrastructure many times over.

Please consider: is this re-zoning proposal supporting real prosperity for Taos?

*Polly Raye founded the Apple Tree Restaurant in the 1970s and has developed and managed the John Dunn Shops*