

My Turn

Letter to the mayor and town councilors on rezoning

Jay and Ethel Rose

The Taos News, 2/18/2016

We have been reading and hearing about the proposed rezoning to accommodate Smith's plan to move and enlarge. For several reasons we feel a hasty decision by town officials would be a disservice to the community. Here are some things to consider before such a decision is finalized. 1. This is a decision that would affect all the residents of the area and it seems that the people must be consulted before such a decision is made by a powerful few to accommodate an outside business interest, very little of whose money stays in town. Since the decision to rezone would have such profound effects on us all it would, therefore, be wise to have a public forum to explain the implications of the issue thoroughly before any vote is taken.

2. Most affected would be the residents who live in the area around the property under discussion. Having a big box store so near their homes would impact their quality of life and dramatically affect their property values. Not to mention making the neighborhood less attractive.

3. While it is perhaps true that the approach to the "historic area of town" is arguably not as attractive as it might be; replacing the smaller buildings already there with a big box store with the potential consequence of opening the door for other big box stores to be built in the area and creating a huge parking lot would not enhance the area and, in fact, has the potential of making that area look like Cerrillos in Santa Fe — not something that would be desirable as the lead in to the center of Historic Taos.

4. When Smith's says it wants to enlarge, what exactly does that mean? Is their new building to be a Super Walmart-like store a la the Smith's in Los Alamos which sells many other items, not just groceries? Does Taos really need such a store and what about the impact such a store would have on Taos' small businesses? Would not just a newer more modern grocery store suit Taos' needs, if such a need actually exists? Will the new store adhere to the 80,000 square foot rule? Is any of this known and, if so, has the public been made aware of such plans? All these questions and probably more should be brought into the sunlight so the public is aware of the advantages and pitfalls of such a move before a decision is thrust upon us.

5. If Smith's (Kroger) feels the current store must be relocated and built anew, other locations to consider would be the large lot where the old Hacienda Inn was demolished or the lot across the street where the defunct funeral home is. A move to either of those locations would have several advantages:

- Grocery stores would be more evenly located in the area — one at the north end, two in the middle and one at the south end.

- A blight at the south end of town would be remediated.
- The things mentioned in 2 and 3 above would be avoided.

6. What happens if Smith's is allowed to move across the street from its existing location? Are we not left with a new blight where the existing store is? Another big empty building?

Not exactly a pretty sight for the area.

Obviously, this also would be the case if Smith's moved anywhere else. We have read that the current Smith's store was built over an underground water source which could be causing problems. If Smith's were to relocate, ideally to the south, it should be stipulated that it is Smith's responsibility to demolish the old building. Perhaps a few new smaller, architecturally compatible buildings could be built closer to the street with the parking lot put over the problem area in the back where the existing building is to correct such a blight.

We urge you to consider the consequences of your decision in a thoughtful manner and to take into account the feelings of Taos residents regarding this issue. Please do not be swayed by the upcoming election or by the pressure of an out of town big money business interest in the rush to an immediate vote. In other words: Think carefully and do the right thing for the community you were elected to represent.

Jay and Ethel Rose are residents of Taos.

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