

My Turn

Plaza merchants seek compromise on farmers market

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On April 12, the Taos Farmers Market was on the council agenda for review and approval. Several items were added to this issue: a three-year lease and a consideration to close the Plaza off to traffic during this event.

Many spoke in support of the event and even a 400-name Facebook survey was presented. The Taos Plaza merchants opposed to this event made a presentation too.

There were 28 petitions from Plaza business owners requesting that the event not be placed on the Plaza due to the economic hardships this event has posed. It was pointed out that of the 400 names from Facebook that the majority of them had no economic interest in this decision like the Taos Plaza merchants.

It was also pointed out that many of the Plaza merchants, as a group, have tried to negotiate a compromise to the layout of the event. Their request was to pull the event to the south and east sides of the Plaza and leave the North and West sides free of vendors and open to traffic. This would open up 24 more parking spaces and allow traffic to flow through the Plaza.

In this case no vendors would be affected by the traffic. It would require the farmers market to limit their number of vendors or redesign their site layout. A highlight of the discussion was the presentation by the Plaza merchants that the town was in violation of an ordinance in the town code: Title 5, Chapter 5.08 of the Town of Taos Ordinance – Fiestas, Carnivals and Festivals – Item 5.08.070: Authority to Use Public Streets or Public Parks – Item A states the following: “The town council has authorized use of town plaza and its surrounding public streets only for the annual Taos Fiestas (including the parade). However the town plaza park may be authorized for certain other public events and activities by the town manager, or his designee, provided the surrounding public streets are not closed.”

A clarification of this ordinance point was requested by two of the council members. The town attorney stated three times that this was merely a resolution and not an ordinance. The town manager stated that a resolution is often modified by a new council as new policies are made.

If anyone goes to the town of Taos website under the legal department heading you can look at the town code. It clearly states that the town code was last updated by ordinance 15-07 passed Sept. 8, 2015. Therefore, Title 5 Chapter 5.08 of the Town Ordinance item 5.08.070 is part of an ordinance not a resolution.

I imagine, or can only hope, that the town attorney would realize his mistake and try to correct it. But since the agenda item to allow the farmers market to have a three-year lease and perhaps whatever else they want — full closure of the Plaza etc. — was approved by a 3-to-1 vote it may all be a moot point.

Once again, compromise does not seem to be a concept that is ever under consideration these days. This is all many of the Taos Plaza merchants have wanted. This writer requests that those who may bad mouth those who oppose the farmers market Plaza location open their minds and realize that it important to listen to the needs and concerns of all the participants and to structure the logistics of an event so it will benefit everyone. It can be done.

Lynn FitzGerald is a prior Taos merchant, a prior staff member of the "old" Taos Project, a prior Main Street director in Arizona and Colorado and a current Taos resident.

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