

## My Turn

# Fernandez wants to establish architectural standards commission

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We all love the quirky charm of Taos — otherwise we wouldn't be here. We are unique, and that is why people from all over the world visit our community. In Taos, our traditions are mixed into the adobe walls of our buildings and flow with the water running through our acequias!

We, therefore, must strike a careful balance with respect to development. We cannot say "no" to every project or every idea that comes our way. We don't have to say "yes" to everything, either. We do need jobs, especially ones that offer wages and benefits that make it possible for people to afford to continue to live here.

We are at a moment with a new council where we can make bold decisions that will protect our heritage while allowing Taos to grow. We can show that we are open for business without losing what makes Taos special.

In what will be a series of policy plans, I will bring forth a vision for growing our Taos economy in a way that respects and holds true to our values, while allowing us to look and move forward as a community where our locals want and can afford to stay here — and visitors and investors feel welcome. We need a more specific code for how buildings should look. This will protect the feel of our community while making it easier for new businesses to navigate our regulations. Right now, a developer can come forward and build an unsightly structure with minimal concern to its appearance. Said developer also may have to jump through many regulatory hoops to get a project approved.

If we have a set of strong architectural design standards, we will keep our community from looking like every other strip mall in America, while at the same time giving developers a clear understanding of how we want buildings to look. This preserves our uniqueness while making it easier for development — as the rules will be clear — therefore reducing the need for multiple hearings in front of multiple commissions.

In this way, we all win. We will feel comforted knowing that any new business will not be an eyesore, and any new development will respect the nature of our community. Developers will be more likely to invest in our community if they know our processes are fair and clear. And out of this, we will attract higher-quality investments that create good-paying jobs.

How so? Well, let's say a developer wants to bring a business to Taos that will create \$15 per hour jobs — much more than the prevailing minimum wage. Such a business will require a land and construction investment of several million dollars. Why would a developer invest such money in the community if any low-wage, low-investment retail or restaurant operator could just build an unsightly building next door? Such an ideal developer wouldn't, because

the low-wage, low-investment building next door would decrease the value of surrounding properties.

Strong architectural design standards will not only protect the character of Taos and make it easier for people to navigate the regulatory environment, it also will encourage higher-quality investment that brings higher- wage jobs!

How do we create such standards? I propose, and will ask for support from my fellow council members, to establish an architectural standards commission. Such a commission will include developers, realtors, lawyers, citizens and activists who will present a document that reflects the desires of our community — because it comes from the community. I've already spoken to many who express support for such standards. Even our town employees are asking for strong architectural design standards!

When I ran for office, I said I would bring people together. I'm doing it, and I present to you the beginning of what will be a fruitful relationship between government and citizen — really, the creation of a true citizen government. As I bring other ideas forward, you will see how a strong and clear vision will grow our community responsibly and with our heritage in mind. I cannot do it alone, however.

I ask for your continued support. Involve yourself in the process by serving on one of our commissions. Speak to our other town councilors and county commissioners. Together, we will move Taos forward while remaining firmly rooted in our history, heritage and culture. Que viva!

*Fernandez is a councilor of the Taos Town Council.*



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