

My Turn

Put Taos on a path to promote development and protect heritage

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The Taos News, 9/15/2016

For most of this year, the Taos council chamber has been an arena for pitched battles between competing visions of our town's future. Indeed, the very heart, soul and spirit of Taos has seemed to be under persistent attack.

Without an adopted current plan for future development, Taos is ripe for invasion by powerful outside economic interests indifferent to the sacred history of this place.

Taos is periodically lobbied by outside interests with promises of employment riches, if only we would alter our regulations and accommodate to their designs. But without a controlling plan in place to guide our growth, there is no protection from present-day snake oil salesmen with no long-term interest in our community. Acceptance of piecemeal proposals would result in an incoherent patchwork of unplanned change.

To our dismay, our town staff has been an advocate for these current development incursions, all in the name of economic opportunity. The town manager recently recited an extensive list of benefits likely to accrue from a development initiative requiring radical rezoning of an historically sensitive area in the heart of town. His litany of expected benefits was so vast that I joked about it promising everything but a cure for cancer and heart disease. Most of us understand that when something seems too good to be true, it's just that.

Meanwhile, compelling community problems likely receive less than our talented town staff's full attention. We should focus on problems that already enjoy broad consensus and not be diverted or distracted by unplanned development pot shots. Good infrastructure would help old and new business alike, generating jobs and needed tax revenues. Our aged infrastructure clearly needs work.

The current process has stoked caricaturing tensions between community subgroups. This can come to no good. Relatively recent arrivals in Taos are depicted as reflexive voices of indifferent, self-absorbed rejection of any and all change. Those with multi-generational histories are stereotyped as naive dupes, seduced by promises of good job possibilities for their families and unable to see the threat to the community's essence. It is in our vital self-interest that we who love Taos devise a "clean," proactive plan for economic development, one that would not risk the heart, soul and spirit of this place we cherish. Perhaps the outside threat to our town's tomorrows will unite us in opposing our common foe.

But in the end, there is more that unites us than divides us. We all love and cherish this sacred Taos motherland. In this, we are as one.

In this, we are family. Family members aid one another.

They support each other's hopes and dreams. They protect one another. Family is the place where when you show up lost, they have to take you in. So let's come together as family and fashion a solution to growth that is consistent with what is sacred about Taos. As we grope for the tomorrow of our dreams, let's hold hands and stick together. In order to stimulate growth without sacrificing the spirit of Taos, I urge our council to take these steps. Direct the town manager to actively engage with the community in a collaborative effort to create and adopt a master plan to proactively guide Taos' growth while protecting its sacred spirit. And neither recommend nor permit any zoning changes prior to the adoption of this comprehensive plan.

Make no mistake about it.

This is not a proposal to "kick the can down the road." Rather, it's an effort to put Taos on a path that will promote development and protect Taos' heritage. We hope our Taos extended family will echo our plea, and email, telephone, and/or visit with our mayor and council members in support of this proposal. If we are to secure the Taos of our tomorrows, we've simply got to get this right. In words often attributed to Benjamin Franklin, "Failing to plan is planning to fail."

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