

Editorial

Defining Taos' future takes public ideas, participation

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Taos faces many challenges, as do all the rural towns in the county:

- Home prices continue rising in the valley.
- Living costs outpace Taos salaries.
- Jobs that pay a living wage are scarce.
- Agricultural lands continue to dwindle as more houses are built on them.
- Young people who leave for college often don't return.
- The town needs money to fix potholes, provide much-needed social services and renovate buildings.
- Drug use and the crimes associated with it continue to increase.

The town and some partners are launching a project to find out how residents think these problems could best be solved and what they want to see in Taos' future. Organizers call it "Strong at Heart." The town council explains more in a "My Turn" column here. The town needs a whole lot of input from Taosenos if the effort is to mean anything. People of all ages, cultures, professions and walks of life need to participate and share their ideas. Construction workers, single parents, recovering addicts, doctors, janitors, lawyers, unemployed people, grandparents and teenagers must voice their concerns and wishes for the future of this beautiful place. The town needs people who've been here for generations and newcomers.

Anything less will leave town officials operating in a vacuum and likely making decisions that upset a lot of people.

This isn't the first time the town has tried to involve the public and figure out its future. In 1999, after dozens of meetings and lots of public comment, the town approved a "Vision 2020" plan. That plan was later used by opponents to stop some big business ventures.

But for the town and Taosenos to resolve big problems, they will need people from different viewpoints to think creatively and cooperatively. They need to be focused on viable solutions, not personal vendettas.

For example, people who've opposed commercial projects the likes of a larger Smith's and a super Walmart need to come to the table with specific examples of what kinds of businesses that pay living wages would work well here. And town officials need to not just look at big-box stores or four-story hotels – and the minimum wage jobs they provide – as the best way to boost economic development.

Addressing the pressing needs in Taos requires participation by all of us. How do we pay for a detox center over the long haul? How do we best address the underlying multigenerational issues that contribute to domestic violence and addiction? How do we preserve and enhance the beautiful Taos landscape and agricultural lands that attracted people here in the first place?

Whether people like it or not, Taos is changing. It always has.

Take time to attend the Strong at Heart kickoff public meeting in this effort, hosted by town officials with food and child care at the Sagebrush Inn on Monday (June 12) at 5:30 p.m.

Come be a part of Taos' future.

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