

Editorial

Small towns get innovative to grow economies

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Small towns scattered across New Mexico from Farmington to Truth or Consequences and from Taos to Ratòn are struggling to boost their economies and help their communities thrive.

Geographically, politically and culturally, all of these towns are distinct. But they share some big challenges when it comes to jobs, workforce, affordable housing, health care and education. All of these towns are losing some of their talented young people to bigger cities with more opportunities..

Beginning this week, online and in print over the next two weeks, *The Taos News* will provide stories and links to other reports from our Solutions Journalism partners called "State of Change," exploring how these towns are tackling the thorny issues around growing their economies.

Some towns, like Farmington and Ratòn, were dependent on high-paying jobs provided by natural resource extraction, such as natural gas and coal. When the prices of those resources were good, those towns boomed. When the prices dropped, they dwindled. They are looking for ways to diversify their economies.

Towns like Taos and Truth or Consequences rely heavily on tourists, visitors with money in their pockets to spend at local businesses. Tourism, like natural resource extraction, has booms and busts. So these towns, too, need to diversify their economies.

For a historic town like Taos, diversifying the economy has some particular challenges.

How do you grow while maintaining what makes you unique?

Which businesses do you encourage and which ones do you chase away in order to maintain that uniqueness?

Other questions are ones all towns are wrestling with.

How do you support the businesses that pay higher than minimum wages?

Could those businesses teach others how to pay better salaries while remaining competitive?

How do you address the lack of affordable housing?

What are the problems within the workforce – such as drugs, lack of a work ethic, lack of skills – and how should they be addressed?

Unlike Ratòn and Truth or Consequences, Taos also lacks some specific resources. The town doesn't have a major interstate, major airport or railroad to help with shipping products. Many areas of the county and town still lack high-speed internet. It doesn't have a ton of water available.

Read the “State of Change” stories in the Oct. 26 and Nov. 2 editions of *The Taos News* and online at taosnews.com .

And check out the next community meeting of “Strong at Heart” Monday (Oct. 30), 5:30-8 p.m. at the Historic Taos County Courthouse, 121 North Taos Plaza. Organizers have spent months gathering ideas and input from residents about how to revitalize downtown Taos. They’re ready to present their findings. Read more at downtowntaos.com. And get involved.

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