



THE TAOS NEWS

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Editorial

Join in discussion of Taos' future

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Planning for the future of our town, our families and ourselves is hard work. It takes effort and commitment. It takes a willingness to consider other viewpoints, ideas and risky ventures.

We applaud the recent efforts of town officials, organizers of Strong at Heart and the hundreds who have participated, to find out what Taosenos want for the future of their beloved community. More work lies ahead and everyone will need to remain involved if anything practical is to come out of this months-long project.

More than 1,300 people of various ages, incomes, cultures and professions gave their opinions on the future of Taos between June and September. About 100 turned out for the recent Oct. 30 meeting to hear what Strong at Heart organizers have learned thus far in the process. Find out more at www.downtowntaos.com.

Organizers worked diligently to connect with a broad swath of residents through forums, personal interviews, surveys and "pop-up" tables at events around town. The Strong at Heart website has a ton of information related to what organizers have heard from people along with graphics starkly showing how Taos has changed based on data.

Here's some of what data shows about Taos demographics, housing, incomes and agriculture, once a primary economic driver of the region: Our population is growing but also aging. The average age is 47, older than the average for New Mexico and the U.S.; and the biggest growth has been in those aged 60-69, people retired or nearing retirement.

We remain much more culturally diverse than the United States as a whole.

And, perhaps most importantly, our families are largely "non-traditional." Few families are a married couple with children. Twice as many are single or married with no children.

Far more are married without children and single people living alone.

While the average rent price is lower than the state average (which surprised many of us), the cost of housing still takes 45 percent or more of most Taosenos' income and more than one out of every three people make less than \$20,000 a year.

Few can live on that level of income without help in a town like Taos.

Here are a few broad themes Strong at Heart organizers have heard Taosenos say they value most strongly about their community: They love living in a "unique small town." They want to honor the legacy and heritage of Taos Pueblo and Spanish cultures. They recognize how deeply we are tied to the land, air and water around us. They believe Taos is a caring community and want to keep it that way. They enjoy the "individual freedom resulting from the abundance of creativity and an accepting culture." They love the surrounding outdoor

landscape and the ease with which they can access public lands. They believe children and families are important.

Later this month, Strong at Heart organizers will host the next forum where participants can come up with goals for the town. These goals could guide town officials in their decisions, and give Taosenos a way to measure the progress.

Strong at Heart will need to continue reaching out to people in various ways – maybe setting up a table on evenings and weekends in front of dollar stores and grocery stores to hand out surveys and flyers announcing the next gathering would be the most effective way to reach people who often feel left out of the process.

And Taosenos of all ages, incomes and cultures will need to stay committed to the process if it is to work at all, and not fall by the wayside as so many planning attempts have in the past.

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