

## My Turn

### New priority on planning needed in Taos

John Plummer

*The Taos News*, 11/9/2017

I read with interest John Miller's article. *Rebuilding Main Street*. (*The Taos News*, 10/26/2017).

John did not mention this, but Taos had its own project supported by Main Street a few years ago. A team from the School of Architecture & Planning at the University of New Mexico visited for a few days in Spring 2010. Their report, *Identifying opportunity within the arts & cultural district of Taos, NM*, reviewed the current condition, and outlined possible development opportunities, for seven areas in the Taos Historic District. This report is available on-line [ataosgov.com/econdev/econdev.php](http://ataosgov.com/econdev/econdev.php).

This was an excellent report; so what happened? Essentially nothing! No group was formed that could effectively pursue any opportunities. No priorities were established or development plans prepared. In fact, we failed to prepare follow-up proposals for the Main Street program until the very last minute, when a proposal was presented to the Town Council with only days remaining before the application deadline. It was too little and too late. In short, we blew it.

So what might be needed to get back in the good graces of Main Street America and Metropolitan Redevelopment Area programs? I suggest a few steps.

First, we need to demonstrate that we, the Town of Taos and Taos County, are serious about planning. It will be necessary to build a unified platform for planning. Unified, not coordinated, a single planning entity that can tackle regional as well as localized issues. This has been often discussed, but little if any action taken.

Second, we need to assemble the results of valuable planning activity already completed. These include the aforementioned report as well as such others as Vision 20/20 (1999), The Town of Taos Comprehensive Plan (?), Taos Economic Development Action Plan (2013), the Taos County Growth Management Plan (2007), and even the Taos Regional Water Plan (2016).

While most of these documents fall substantially short of being actual plans (i.e., describing who will do what, when, at what cost, and with what results), they do provide some support for action plans of this sort.

Third, we need to do a better job of involving the community. First step will be to define major areas, e.g., economic development, infrastructure, health care, education, etc.

I will use health care as an example. Expenditures on health care for Taos County residents are estimated to be in excess of \$300 million annually; this alone indicates relevance for economic development. A step in the right direction, the county recently formed a Taos County Health Council.

Their mission statement adopted the goal of providing accessible, affordable health care for all Taos County residents.

However, their efforts have been thwarted by the fact that, at last report, they haven't been able to act because they have not been able to get their by-laws approved. As a result they have not been able to reach out to the various health care providers to involve them in planning new and better approaches to achieving their goal.

It is clear that the elements necessary for planning need to be strengthened. Bringing together a group of senior Anglos to tell us "what they love about Taos" is not going to cut it.

What is needed now is strong political support, by the mayor and town council, by the county manager and board of supervisors, to break out of the too oft-repeated cycle of developing documents that serve their primary role, as Matt Spriggs, former director of planning for the town put it, as another set of doorstops.

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