

## My Turn

### Strong At Heart continues to weaken

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The recent Strong at Heart event at Bataan Hall was lightly attended and provided scant new information about the progress towards meeting the original goals of “identifying solutions and defining appropriate development.”

Many saw that “there is nothing new here” and left early, continuing the impression this was merely artful deception on behalf of the mayor in collusion with the town manager. The Strong at Heart effort, as documented on the *downtowntaos.com* website, alleges more than 1,300 participants, No evidence is given that these are “unique” participants. Many, I suspect, are repeat attendees or respondents much like myself.

As I look at the demographic detail contained in the Phase 1 Public Input Summary, I wonder why none of this was available as findings of significant interest at the latest meeting. Instead, we were told “it’s being developed,” which is clearly misleading.

Information about the dollar cost to the locals is also missing. Yes, there was a grant, but town of Taos staff time is not covered by a grant.

What are the total costs to date and what benefit (hard results) have we seen? This is basic project management.

Visiting the *downtowntaos.com* website, the same questions have been asked over and over at these meetings and events to “identify values.” This is not particularly helpful.

For 10 months, it seems the attendees have been sitting through the same process. Ask anyone: Do you want job opportunities and a living wage? Do you want a family- friendly place to live? Do you want a safe place to walk at night? Do you want a caring community?

The answers are obvious. Not surprisingly, the youth are in pretty much agreement (also from the Phase 1 Public Input Summary) with the overrepresented, elder white folks. It is good that we now have documented “what we love about Taos” and that many relevant comments were recorded.

What do we (the residents of the town and the county) really want from this effort?

Let’s revisit the existing town of Taos master plan, or Vision 2020. It calls for all the same basics: responsible growth, historical preservation, economic development, community design and infrastructure improvements.

Great. This has been talked about for 20 years now. Recall also the overlooked and well-developed study provided by the Design & Planning Assistance Center of the UNM School of Architecture in Albuquerque. This excellent, 106-page report entitled, “Weaving Together

Past, Present and Future: Identifying Opportunity Within the Arts + Cultural District of Taos, NM," (Spring, 2010), has many good ideas for the plaza and other central areas of Taos.

"Ultimately, this project is about taking action" the Strong at Heart website states. Enough of the repetitive "understand our shared values."

We know well what the guiding principles are. After 10 months of feel-good, it's time for the recommended strategies, proposed actions, project prioritization, evidence of commitment through town of Taos budget line items, and "an implementation action plan."

The town of Taos has basic policy. What is missing and needed is leadership and decisions. We don't need more "community-led conversations." We need the action that was promised.

*Daniel Pritchard is a Taos resident.*



**Taos residents consider choices for downtown during a recent Strong at Heart meeting.  
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