

## Editorial

### Next steps for downtown?

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“Preserve open space and agricultural lands. Create a self-sufficient, strong economy that pays good wages and doesn’t rely on tourism; respect for diverse cultures; recreational and youth opportunities; affordable housing; education; water and natural resource protection.”

This wish list could have been written today a reflection of the things Taosenos say repeatedly that they want.

But that paragraph was written in 1999, a part of the Vision 2020 plan created by town of Taos officials after a three-year long process to gather feedback from a broad swath of more than 350 residents.

The plan was one of a long list of them set out every few years to try and guide the town’s future: 1963,1973,1986.

About every 10 years, Taos officials and the community try to figure out what their beloved town should look like decades into the future. Officials worry over the best way to reach a wide variety of people in the community. Some people in the community participate in developing a vision of the future. Many Taosenos don’t, or can’t, participate. One becomes the vocal minority; the other, the silent majority.

A plan is finally produced, filled with aspirations and ideas for an inspired future Taos.

A few of the things in the plan become a reality. Most of the ideas never see the light of day, in part because the people affected by those plans can’t agree on what should happen.

Then they complain when nothing gets accomplished.

The latest attempt to find out what Taosenos want the future of Taos to look like, at least downtown, is Strong at Heart.

The result of a months-long process gathering public comments at town halls, pop-ups and in surveys, is not to create a plan. The initiative’s entire purpose was to simply gather ideas from as many Taosenos as possible.

The Strong at Heart endeavor was driven in part by the next phase of construction along Paseo del Pueblo, right through the heart of Taos. It will be a tricky business to figure out how the road can be improved to ease traffic flows and improve parking without impacting the historic nature of downtown. Federal funds are available for the project, but if Taos doesn’t use them, they’ll go to another town.

Strong at Heart organizers will soon present a document listing what they heard from the community.

Then it will be up to the community and town officials to decide exactly what projects will and won't get accomplished.

Once again, this takes public participation. And, above all, a willingness to collaborate and cooperate on all sides.

Some want Taos to remain exactly as it is. But it has never stayed the same. As photos and stories you'll find in this week's edition show, Taos has always been changing. The Taos of today, even downtown, does not look like it did 30, 40 or 50 years ago. Nor do the surrounding communities, which have grown dramatically since 1999, but still rely on the town for their shopping, library, recreational opportunities and more.

"The history of Taos is a story of change, adaptation and the interaction of three cultures that both complicates and enriches the reality in which Taosenos live today," said the writers of Taos Vision 2020.

Recent family-friendly efforts have helped bring Taosenos back down to the heart of their historic community: Farmers Market, Taos Plaza Live Music, Taos First Fridays and Movies on the Green in Kit Carson Park. Most of those events are in the summer, but it is a glimmer of hope that some aspects people most love about our beautiful little town, have not completely disappeared.

On May 14 Strong at Heart organizers will hold a "walkability" workshop from 3 p.m.-6:30 p.m. for the community to rate how easy or how difficult it is to walk in downtown and whether it is a pleasant experience. Then on May 14, 15, 16 from 4 to 6:30 p.m., organizers are asking people to drop by The Hub, 107 Civic Plaza Drive and give their thoughts on some downtown design ideas. Finally, join in the street party May 17. ([doivntowntaos.com/events/downtown-design-workshop](http://doivntowntaos.com/events/downtown-design-workshop))

Go if you can. Then pitch in to help town leaders decide how to keep that downtown heart strong.