



THE TAOS NEWS

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Groups seek ideas for making downtown Taos pedestrian, bicycle friendly

By Taos Land Trust staff

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Taos is not known for being friendly to pedestrians and bicyclists, say three groups hosting a kind of walking workshop Monday (May 14).

“With too few sidewalks, poorly designed intersections and almost no bike trails, Taos can be a downright dangerous place to walk or bike. A growing number of Taos residents, however, are ready for that to change,” says a statement from Taos Land Trust, Strong at Heart and the University of New Mexico Prevention Research Center.

“Our town was built around walkability,” said Taos Town Councilor Darien Fernandez, referring to the early years of the town’s 400-year history where walking or animal transportation were the only options for getting around Taos. “It’s exciting to be part of a project that brings us back to where we began. We’ve seen over the last 60 years the result of our automobile addiction: sprawl, traffic congestion, acres of parking lots and the loss of community. We now have the chance to begin fixing it.”

On Monday (May 14) from 3-6:30 p.m. the groups will host the Taos Walkability Workshop right in the center of Taos. This workshop will help town planners find ways to ease some of the dangerous problems associated with a car-dominated community. The workshop will be in conjunction with the design charette Strong at Heart is facilitating that week. The workshop findings will be tied into the final design plans for downtown Taos.

“It’s hard to be a good neighbor when you’re sitting in your car,” said Dave Weaver, former Taos Police Chief.

The Walkability Workshop will evaluate six hot spots in the downtown for factors that affect bike and walkability. These hot spots have higher rates of close-calls and accidents with pedestrians and bicyclists, according to Strong at Heart data collected from community members.

“If community members are able to safely walk and bike as a mode of transport, the health and social well-being of our community will benefit as we come together and take back what it means to be healthy and connected to one another,” said Maya Anthony of the Taos Land Trust.

The six sites that will be evaluated as part of the workshop are:

- Group 1- Enos Garcia Elementary School
- Group 2- Valverde Street/ Camino de la Placita to Ranchitos Road intersection
- Group 3- Ranchitos Road to Salazar intersection and to Camino del Medio intersection • Group 4- La Posta Road to Taos High School
- Group 5- Siler Road to Los Pandos Intersection

- Group 6- Paseo del Pueblo Norte at Quesnel to Kit Carson Road intersection

The inspiration for the Walkability Workshop came from the UNM Prevention Research Center when conversations around community health in Taos began earlier this year. Since then, the center has provided a lot of support in organizing the workshop as part of its mission to address the health promotion and disease prevention needs of New Mexico communities through participatory, science-based, health promotion and disease prevention research.

“A walk in nature has many benefits: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. But when a community can walk together, we build connection with each other, and the benefits increase exponentially,” said Taos Town Councilor Pascualito Maestas in a press release about the workshop.

In alignment with this mission, Taos Land Trust is motivated to advocate for better livability for all Taosenos through equitable opportunities and resources to live an active lifestyle.

Currently, many barriers exist to access safe, walkable space in Taos. This is especially true for low-income households and those with physical challenges. “Our goal is to promote better bike and walkability in town to bridge the gap in access so that all Taosenos have an enhanced quality of life,” said Anthony of the Taos Land Trust in a statement.

“It is vital that we, as members of the community, connect with natural spaces and ways to access them for community health and our own health, well-being and enjoyment,” said Susie Fiore, executive director of the Field Institute of Taos, a local nonprofit that encourages outdoor activity. “Improved walkability and bike-ability will increase our sense of place and connections with others, self and landscape,” Workshop participants will meet at The Hub on Civic Plaza Drive across from the SOMOS offices at 3 p.m. Various workshop groups will head out at 3:30 p.m. and reconvene at 5:15 p.m. to share results and discuss next steps.



Traffic is always a concern for anyone within the downtown area. Three groups hosting a “walkability workshop” Monday (May 14) to look at improving downtown for pedestrians and bicyclists. Rick Romancito