

## Taos scores a MainStreet Accelerator slot

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After several years of work, the town of Taos has been selected to participate in a statewide program that helps towns revive and fix up historic downtowns.

Taos was one of two communities selected for the New Mexico MainStreet Accelerator Program out of more than a dozen that applied. The program is one step in a long process for communities to become nationally designated MainStreet towns.

The ultimate aim is to create environments downtown and in surrounding neighborhoods that help sustain existing local businesses and attract local entrepreneurs all while protecting culture and history. Most importantly, MainStreet programs are supposed to be driven by the community, according to information from the statewide program.

New Mexico MainStreet will help Taos work towards the revitalization and restoration of some of the downtown areas. The accelerator program with MainStreet includes a 12- to 18-month process to get ready for some small revitalization efforts around town, and to develop “steering committees” instrumental in forming the official MainStreet Taos board.

“This really needs to come from the community,” said Marketing and Tourism Director Karina Armijo. “We just need participation. Real hands-on participation.”

A series of upcoming meetings will be held for the MainStreet project for those interested in the four points of MainStreet. Community members will be able to participate in orientation sessions focused on organization, promotion, design and economic vitality. The overall goal will be to form a community-led organization that will seek the approval and funding for improvements to Taos’ downtown district and historical areas. These steering committees will also be responsible for constructing a finance plan for future projects.

Participants at these meetings will receive assistance and information from New Mexico MainStreet. According to Armijo, Taos has already committed to \$15,000 for MainStreet.

“New Mexico MainStreet is excited to deepen our partnerships with Santa Rosa and Taos,” New Mexico MainStreet Co-Director Rich Williams said in a release. “We recognize incredible engagement in these communities and look forward to assisting them with their capacity building and economic development work.”

New Mexico MainStreet works as a partner with communities. Many of the 28 MainStreet communities in New Mexico hold historical districts in their scope of focus and Taos Accelerator would work with the historical significance of Taos in mind for all projects according to Armijo. Currently, New Mexico MainStreet serves 27 affiliated MainStreet Districts, eight state-authorized Arts & Cultural Districts, 14 Frontier Community projects, and six Historic Theater Initiatives, according to the organization’s website. Las Vegas and Raton are both accredited MainStreet communities in addition to being state authorized arts and cultural districts.

The Taos Accelerator initiative will consider the community input into another downtown project, Strong at Heart, which recently released some possible ideas for making downtown a more pedestrian and bike-friendly area. The board will ultimately decide the boundaries of the main street district as well as the initiatives the project will work toward. According to Armijo, the Taos Accelerator is in the beginning stages and will need a lot of input from the community to be able to revitalize die downtown area.

“It’s the heart of the community and it affects everyone,” Armijo said.

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