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My Turn

Time for a home rule petition in Taos

BY MATTHEW SWAYE

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Are you a lucid dreamer? I'm reading about the lucid dreaming techniques of the Senoi of Malaysia, a home rule society.

They create useful gifts and ideas in their dreams to bring back to the waking world. Dreams are discussed at breakfast, and the most useful are sent with their dreamers to the dream council. If a child has a dream about a new tool, her dream gift is brought to council for consideration. The best ideas are enacted by the community.

In the local politics of the Senoi, ideas have worth.

Here, at home, our potential is curtailed: Manager Bellis says home rule isn't worth the effort. Places that adopt it soon regret it. It gives us no more freedom or access. It's divisive, costly - too expensive. It's anarchy, it's not well-suited for the town.

To me, home rule means more choices and broader participation – the sharing of dreams and aspirations.

The law says it means new rights, responsibilities and privileges for the citizens and the town.

Where council-manager has begun to function as manager-council, home rule allows residents to flip the script and chart a new path, rethinking almost everything:

1) The number of council members, their terms, and how they're elected. (More council members? Shorter terms? Higher pay? Ranked choice voting to be sure we don't ever again accidentally get an all-male town government?)

2) The duties of the mayor, council and of specific staff members. (Strong mayor and council with town manager as a competitive, elected post? Eliminate the manager role altogether?)

3) The right to initiatives and referendums. (We can, for example, recall from office politicians who betray us.)

4) The procedures and ethics of the governing body. (Instead of council members voting "yay" or "nay" without explanation, they can tell us what this vote means to constituents.)

By state law, a home rule petition must include 5 percent of voter signatures. In the town of Taos, that's only 250 signers. A paper petition must be completed within a twomonth period and submitted to Ms. Garcia, the town clerk, to certify.

A citizen committee then has six months to redraft the town code and put it to voters for consideration.

I believe the town is the perfect size for local control. It's small and the people are kind and creative.

I'm learning about "co-opetition," a model of interaction that successfully balances cooperation and competition. One of the main components of "co-opetition" is documentation.

The home rule petition process and participants will be the subject of a film. "Kangaroo" is the working title of this local documentary, a collaboration, now in preproduction.

I'm excited to see "co-opetition" applied to a civic campaign, such as the push for home rule in the town of Taos. Please email homeruletaos@gmail.com for more information and to get involved.

Matthew Swaye lives in Taos.

Editor's note: Read more about the history and meaning of Home Rule, see the Home Rule Charter explanation online at <https://nmml.org/wp-content/uploads/28Home-Rule-Charter.pdf>