



THE TAOS NEWS

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A Taos economic development strategy

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It is time to develop a local economic development strategy that will immediately stimulate the local economy. Current research shows that Taos loses a large percent of the dollars spent by local residence to out of area retailers, including online purchases.

One key stimulant package can include a local Taos Tender that can only be spent here in the Taos area. Here is how it works in other areas and how it can work here.

One of the more successful communities in the United States (Berkshire region of Massachusetts,) developed a plan to keep more money locally. They created a local currency called BerkShares.

This is a local currency that acts on a local scale the same way that national currencies have functioned on a national scale.

The difference is building the local economy by maximizing circulation of trade within a defined region. Used in the early 1900s, local currencies are being recognized today as a tool for sustainable economic development.

The currency distinguishes the local businesses that accept the currency from those that do not, building stronger relationships and a greater affinity between the business community and the citizens of a particular place.

“The people who choose to use the currency make a conscious commitment to buy local first. They are taking personal responsibility for the health and well-being of their community by laying the foundation of a truly vibrant, thriving local economy.

“Dubbed a ‘great economic experiment’ by the *New York Times*, BerkShares are a tool for community empowerment, enabling merchants and consumers to plant the seeds for an alternative economic future for their communities.”

And this great experiment is working.

Here is how it works. Local businesses basically offer a 5 percent discount to anyone who uses this local currency.

Since the money cannot be spent elsewhere, it stays and circulates back into the local economy, creating greater business opportunities for local businesses and residents alike.

How can we use something like this in Taos? The very first way is for the local town council to reinstate the town employee bonus through a Taos Tender program. This is a bonus given to each town employee at the end of the year.

The bonus, however, must be given in a form of a Taos Tender currency that can only be spent in the local community. This would immediately give a needed stimulus to the local business community and help the economic flow trickle upward.

This can be a test of a local currency that will help keep money flowing here in Taos.

When successful, it will stop the out of town spending drain and offer locals a chance to have a discount for shopping locally and it can improve business connections with tourists by recognizing the uniqueness that our area has to offer, including a local tender.

This is truly an idea whose time has come. It is now up to our local government officials, the business community and the social elite to back an economic stimulus package that can help jump-start our economy. Come on Taos, you can do it.

Richard Leirer is a resident of Taos.