

## ARTS AND CULTURAL DISTRICT

### The next step

#### *Suggestions for improving the Taos Arts and Cultural District are bound to create a stir*

By Rick Romancito

At last November's "Your Town" charrette, locals gathered for several days in an intensive effort to determine how to improve the area in and around Taos Plaza.

This area has been designated the Taos Arts and Cultural District and their work is one of the most ambitious endeavors ever to be organized in this Northern New Mexican community.

It's also one that, not surprisingly, possesses the potential for controversy. This is Taos, after all. The final product of the National Endowment for the Arts "Your Town" charrette was presented May 5 at the Taos Civic Plaza Convention Center by the faculty and graduate students from the University of New Mexico's Design and Planning Assistance Center. Using the suggestions generated by the charrette, students worked long hours day and night to create a series of illustrative panels that were displayed all along the walls of Bataan Hall.

Many of the locals who helped put those plans together sat in the audience watching as a slide show was given explaining each element.

Each showed some aspect of ways the plaza area might be improved: From creating a "South Gateway," transforming the intersection of Camino de la Placita and Paseo del Pueblo Sur into a multi-level shopping area with underground parking; to a leveled and greened plaza allowing for a more formal stage using a canopy that can be converted to a backdrop/movie screen; to changing the Guadalupe parking lot between Do-a Luz Street and Camino de la Placita into a landscaped "Padre Mart'nez Sculpture Garden"; to developing another landscaped area dubbed a "North Gateway" around the Civic Plaza Drive region.

The overriding theme of all the plans is a design to remove barriers to foot traffic, opening up areas that might otherwise only be reached by walking blocks out of the way to reach a desired destination.

Eloy Jeantete, 82, who was mayor of Taos for so long locals still refer to him as "mayor," was among those who voted to change Taos Plaza from grass to paved areas several years

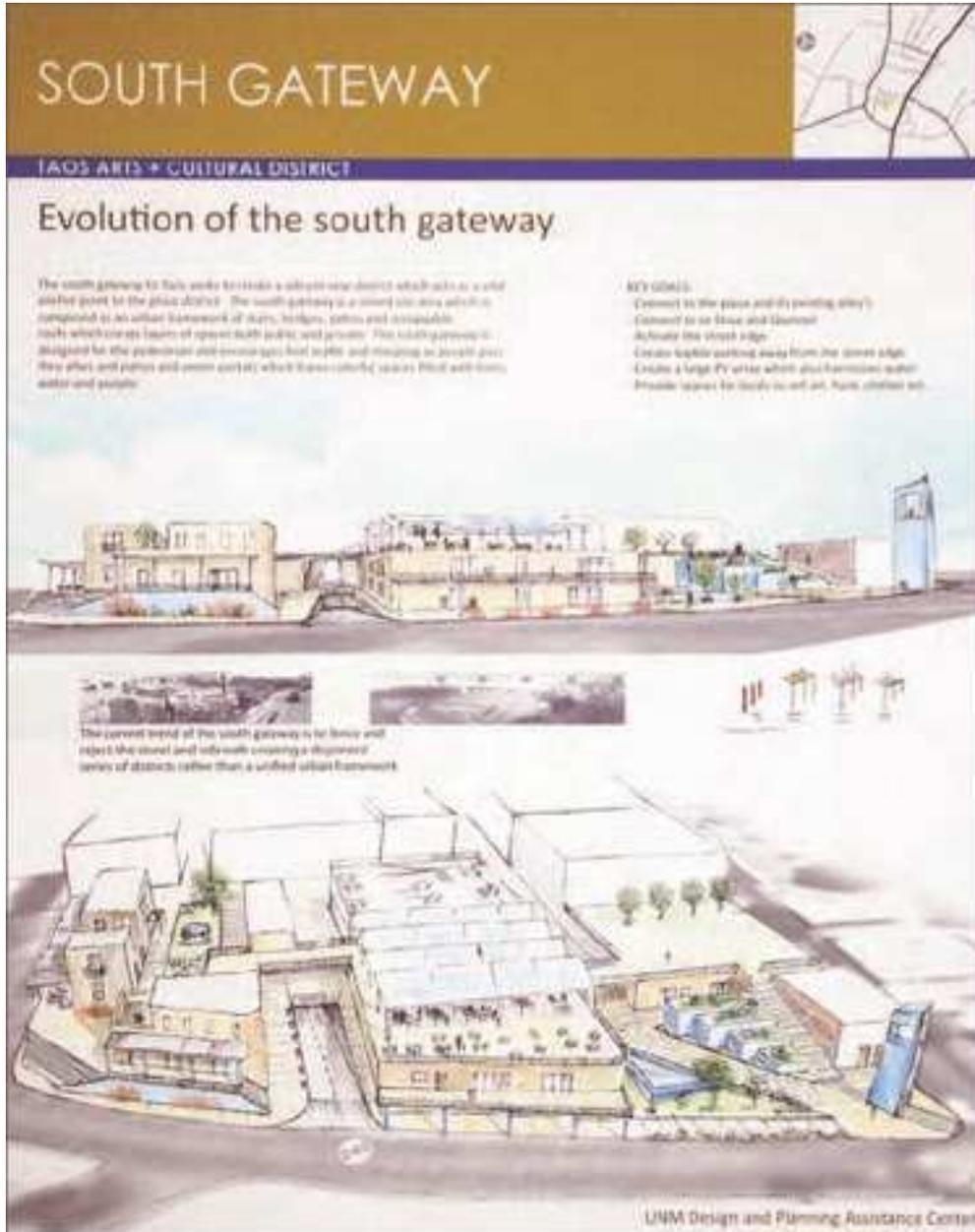
ago. He said the reason they did that in the first place was “for safety reasons,” indicating that all the green was regularly trampled, especially during fiestas.

His biggest concern, though, was a suggestion to move the Bataan War Memorial from the plaza to a spot near Bataan Hall at the Taos Convention Center. “I used to know all those guys,” he said, referring to the local men from the town of Taos and Taos Pueblo who wound up captured and tortured by the Japanese during World War II. To remove that from its place of honor in the center of town might not sit well with veterans, he intimated.

All of that might be moot as time goes on because, as Taos Arts and Cultural District Coordinator Cynthia Spray said, this is only one step in a very long process. Once these plans have been released, a planner will have to be hired who will take them and come up with additional plans and help develop a strategy for paying for it all.

“Cultural economic development is one of the many tools for creating jobs and bettering communities across New Mexico,” an executive summary states in the Taos Arts and Cultural District Resource Team Assessment states. “Its most effective when partnered with the resources of a responsive local government, the dynamism of a broad spectrum of local residents and the commitment of all parties.” For more information or to read the Resource team Assessment, contact Cynthia Spray at [cynthias@taosnet.com](mailto:cynthias@taosnet.com).

**Illustrations provided by the University of New Mexico Design and Planning Assistance Center reveal how some suggestions gleaned from a recent design charrette might look.**



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Another proposal is to open up the plaza and create more of a park-like environment, complete with a stage that can convert from a canopy to a backdrop.