



**STRONG
AT HEART**

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN (PIP)

Strong at Heart | Building a thriving downtown for everyone

Project Purpose

Our Challenges

We Taoseños love our town. We have a rich cultural heritage that dates back centuries, a spectacular location perched on a dramatic high-desert landscape, and friendly, creative (and sometimes outright kooky) residents who give this place a distinct personality.

Our community has worked hard to maintain a strong connection to our past. But we also face significant challenges for the future. The economy has sputtered in the wake of the Great Recession. Blows to the construction industry and the closure of the Questa mine left a lot of locals with few employment options. About 21% of our neighbors are living at or below the poverty line, and our young people are leaving at an alarming rate, largely due to a lack of opportunities.

Most Taoseños have concerns about the impacts of growth on Taos' tradition and small-town feel. Unfortunately, we have yet to build consensus about what steps we can take to address our economic challenges while paying reverence to our history. Too often, our discussions about development erupt into polarizing, unproductive debates that divide us rather than unite us.

We can, and should, do better.

For half a century, Taos' Historic District, the heart of our community, has been at the epicenter of this dilemma: How can we manage development in a way that protects our historic character, supports local businesses and grows the local economy, and contributes to the quality of life of those who live here? We have tried to address these questions in the past with varying degrees of success. We think now is a great time to revisit this conversation, in a productive and inclusive community discussion and with the clear intention of turning our ideas into actions.

The Project

The Town Council has directed the Planning, Community and Economic Development Department to work on a highly participatory and community-driven strategy for the downtown. The Mayor and Council are committed to improving how the Town interacts with its residents. The Town has partnered with Community Builders, a nonprofit organization, to provide the Town with additional expertise in public engagement and community development. The purpose of this community dialogue is to provide an opportunity for Taoseños to come together to think strategically about how we can build a thriving downtown for everyone. This is an exciting opportunity to both do things better than we have in the past, and create an action-oriented vision for the downtown. The outcome of this community dialogue will be the Taos Downtown Strategy which will:

- Identify what Taoseños love about their community and why that matters.
- Develop a shared vision for our downtown and the role we want the downtown to play in our prosperity and quality of life.
- Identify solutions for ongoing community challenges of pedestrian and cyclist safety, declining downtown economic vitality, transportation and parking congestion, and protection of the historic district's character.
- Define what type of development is appropriate for downtown, where that development should happen, and how it should occur in a way that is consistent with our community's values.

Ultimately, this project is about taking action. The result of the project will be a document that summarizes:

- Taoseños shared community values.
- Guiding principles, goals, and recommended strategies for the downtown.
- An implementation action plan.

Following the completion of the Downtown Strategy, the Town of Taos will work to incorporate the results into a formal plan or policy that can be used by decision makers to make development and capital investment decisions in the downtown that are consistent with the community's values and vision.

Public Engagement Approach

We are committed to providing robust opportunities for public participation in local decision making. For this project, the Town is embracing an inclusive and participatory planning approach that will apply the following guiding principles:

- **Be Authentic:** The purpose of this project is to generate grassroots community ideas and opinions about the future of Taos's downtown.
- **Be Inclusive:** Public engagement opportunities are open to all and are designed to reflect the demographics and diversity of the Town's entire population.
- **Be Transparent:** We will provide full transparency about the project's sponsorship, purpose, design, and how decision makers will use the community's input.

- **Be Committed to Openness & Learning:** We do not have a predetermined outcome. Town leadership, as well as community participants, commit to being respectful of the diversity of opinions that exist in the community, listen to each other, and open to and willing to explore all ideas.
- **Support Informed Participation:** Participants will have access to information and/or expertise that will support their ability to successfully participate.

Engagement Goals

- Build trust between local government and community members to enable better collaboration.
- Build trust and bridges that foster understanding and respect between different community stakeholders.
- Enhance our ability to make collaborative decisions.
- Broaden stakeholder involvement that will be more representative of the community as a whole.
- Build the capacity of Town staff to be able to facilitate more effective public engagement long-term, and in future projects.

Engagement Objectives

The purpose of our public outreach opportunities are to:

- Inform community members about the project—it's purpose, background and direction.
- Gather input about what community members love and value in our community.
- Identify and discuss important issues that need to be addressed in order to support a vibrant downtown consistent with the community's values and vision for the future.
- Provide information about potential solutions and strategies for action.
- Gather input from the community about community priorities for action.
- Provide opportunities for the community to shape the downtown vision.

Engagement Strategies

The following types of engagement methods will be used to get Town residents involved that utilize creative and informal activities in addition to more traditional engagement events.

- **Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups** to understand the values, issues, concerns, and approaches from targeted stakeholder groups.
- **Storytelling Events** to gather personal stories from community members in order to understand the values, interest, concerns, and hopes of the community for the future.
- **Creative Submissions** that will include opportunities for the community to submit photos, stories, and videos via social media, cellphone and online platforms.
- **Community Forums**, both on-line and in person, that will promote dialogue and discussion intended to promote community member interaction and shared learning and decision making.
- **Community Questionnaires** to solicit community opinion on community values and the quality of the recommendations and priorities for action.
- **Learning Forums** to learn about community development best practices and provide for informed decision making.

- **Feedback Forms and Pop-Ups** to solicit written input in the form of postcards, stickers, chalkboards, and more from residents in specific locations around Town.
- **Community Presentations** led by the project leadership team to share learning and project progress.
- **Mobile Workshops**, including bikeshops and walkshops, to gain an understanding of the strengths, opportunities, and challenges of enhancing the downtown pedestrian and bicycle safety and walkability.
- **Tactical Urbanism Streetscape Events** to demonstrate some of the potential Paseo Del Sur corridor enhancements to the public and inform strategy development.
- **Design Charrettes** led by design and planning specialists to develop a shared vision for what residents want the downtown to be like 20 years from now.

Public Engagement Summary



Outreach Methods

To reach out and inform the community about the project, the following communication tools will be used:

- **Project Website** will include information about the project, online interactive platforms, a project calendar, and project documents.
- **Email Distribution Lists** will use existing lists, meeting sign-in sheets, and the project website sign-up.
- **E-Notices** will be sent to notify of upcoming opportunities to be involved and provide project updates.
- **Flyers and Posters** will be distributed around the Town to notify residents of events and activities and direct them to the project website.
- **Community Outreach Events** to reach out to residents at popular locations in Town.
- **Media Announcements** on Facebook, Instagram, radio, and the newspaper will provide announcements of progress and upcoming events.
- **Community Presentations** to civic groups, organizations, community groups, and other boards.

Project Leadership

The project is being led by a project team composed of the following staff, elected officials, and citizen advisors:

- Dan Barrone, Mayor
- Nathaniel Evens, Councilman
- Rick Bellis, Town Manager
- Louis Finberg, Planning Director
- John Miller, Senior Planner
- Karina Armijo, Marketing & Tourism Director
- Jim Pollard, Planning Commission Chair
- French Espinosa, Public Works Director
- Jake Caldwell, LOR Foundation
- J.R. Logan, LOR Foundation

The project will also have a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to provide input on the design and implementation of public engagement activities. This committee includes:

- James Dostal, Rio Fernando Neighborhood Association
- Dennis Garcia, US Bank/P & Z Commissioner/Chamber of Commerce
- David Mapes, Gallery Owner/Gallery Assoc./Marketing Committee
- Lisa O'Brien, Taos Community Foundation
- Nicole Scotto-Collignon, Community Activist
- Polly Raye, John Dunn Shops/Historic District Resident/Activist
- Victoria Gonzales, UNM Taos Workforce Development/TEN
- Joleen Montoya, Bridges Project

- Peter Rich, Forest Service/BLM
- Chris Romero, Centinel Bank
- Louis Moya, UNM-Taos/Workforce Development/Digital Media
- Rita Daniels, KNCE
- Nina Gonzales, UNM-TECC
- Rohm Padilla, Taos High School Athletics
- Kevyn Gilbert, LiveTaos.org
- Lindsay Mapes, Turquoise Tours
- Janet Webb, BeyondTaos.org/Media/Marketing/Community Activist
- Andrew Gonzales, Kit Carson Electric/Community Activist
- Kristina Ortez de Jones, Taos Land Trust
- Jose Gonzales, Los Cumbres Community Services
- Arcenio Trujillo, Sports Editor, Taos News

The Town of Taos is being supported by Community Builders, a non-profit organization based in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Community Builders brings additional human and financial resources to the Town of Taos including public engagement, community planning, and downtown design and development expertise. The Community Builders team consists of:

- Clark Anderson, Community Builders Executive Director
- Matt Farrar, Community Builders Project Manager
- John Lavey, Community Builders Program Director
- Jillian Sutherland, Community Builders Program Director
- Marjo Curgus, Del Corazón Consulting, Public Engagement Specialist

Participants

We will reach out to stakeholders and sectors within the Town of Taos and greater Taos community including, but not limited to:

- Civic groups
- Arts & cultural organizations
- Youth & education
- Business community
- Recreation groups
- Pedestrian & cycling advocates
- Neighborhoods
- Acequia Associations
- Real estate & developers
- Regional governments
- Tourism sector
- Downtown business & property owners
- Faith community
- Nonprofit sector
- Other underrepresented stakeholders who do not typically participate.

Public Input Documentation

All public comments will be collected and summarized. These summaries will be posted regularly to the project website.