



STRONG AT HEART

www.downtowntaos.com
Strong at Heart | Town of Taos

Media Contact:
J.R. Logan
downtowntaos@gmail.com
o. 575-770-9616

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Strong at Heart” Project Seeks Productive Dialogue About Growth

The town of Taos wants to change the way it listens to the public. And for the next several months, it’s asking community members to make themselves heard.

On June 12, the entire community is invited to a kick-off event to mark the beginning of a six-month public engagement and visioning project called “Strong at Heart.” The goal is to figure out what people in Taos value, and apply those values to create a specific vision for the future of downtown.

The June 12 event will run from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at the Sagebrush Inn & Suites Conference Center.

Recent controversies related to growth in Taos have left a lot of people feeling discouraged and mistrustful. Some think the hostile tone of these debates show the community is ill equipped to manage change. The Strong at Heart project is meant to identify ways citizens can work together to respond to increasing growth pressure and significant demographic shifts.

“We all want economic prosperity and we all want to protect what’s special about Taos, but we can’t do either if we keep having these big fights every couple months,” said Jim Pollard, chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission. “We need to get out in front of these issues and discuss as a community where our priorities lie.”

Seeking to rebuild trust and create a more productive dialogue, the town of Taos recently sought help from Community Builders, a Colorado-based nonprofit that offers technical assistance and training to Western communities. The town applied for help, and was selected by Community Builders to conduct a comprehensive community outreach effort aimed at pinpointing the community’s shared values and priorities, then take what was learned and apply those concepts to specific projects and goals for the downtown.

The community outreach is meant to reach as many people as possible, especially those who often don’t participate in the formal public process. Town officials hope to identify better ways to gather meaningful input to inform important decisions so they can work more productively with the residents in the future.

“We’ve made some mistakes and we want to change the way we listen to our community,” said Taos Mayor Dan Barrone. “We want to develop a better dialogue, and we want to find places to compromise for the good of Taos.”



STRONG AT HEART

www.downtowntaos.com
Strong at Heart | Town of Taos

As part of the process, a 22-member citizens committee has been created to ensure that the project reaches people from all corners of the community. Committee members include civic leaders, social workers business owners and activists.

“Too often It seems like our leaders have already made up their minds on these things without a real dialogue with citizens,” said Jim Dostal, a committee member and Taos resident who’s been a vocal opponent of recent development projects supported by the town. “What impressed me about this Community Builders project is that it appeared to be a chance for all of us to listen to one another in a nonconfrontational way.”

Through dialogue, Strong at Heart hopes to empower the community to manage whatever changes are coming in ways that make downtown a more vibrant and comfortable place to be. The goal of this project is not to create yet another plan that collects dust on a shelf. Instead, it’s meant to lead to real action and influence things that are already happening in the historic district.

For instance, the New Mexico Department of Transportation is poised to do an overhaul of Paseo del Pueblo through downtown in 2018. Input from Strong at Heart could influence the DOT highway design, including how to improve traffic flow and pedestrian access downtown.

The Town is also taking steps to condemn at least one dilapidated hotel near the historic district that has been deemed a public nuisance, and the Strong at Heart process could identify creative ways to make better use of properties, as well as other iconic parcels like the Couse Pasture and Mitchell property. Strong at Heart could develop a plan to protect open space and foster a culturally rich downtown while making room for appropriate development.

Additionally, momentum is building around an effort to revitalize acequias within the town limits, including several underutilized ditches that flow in and around the historic district. The Strong at Heart process could help the Town with identifying development policies that will support this effort. What Strong at Heart ultimately focuses on will be a product of the input citizens from Taos provide.

To learn more about Strong at Heart and how to become involved, visit www.downtowntaos.com, follow @TownOfTaos on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, or contact John Miller, Senior Planner for the Town of Taos, at (575) 737-2670 or jmiller@taosgov.com.

###