



MEETING MINUTES

Project: Taos County Comprehensive Plan Update

Subject: First Public Meeting

Meeting Date/Time: April 8, 2024, 2:30 to 4:00 PM, and 6:00 to 7:30 PM

SUMMARY

The two public meetings for the Taos Comprehensive Plan Update were held at the Taos County Council Chambers to introduce the community to the Comprehensive Plan process. Jackie Fishman (Principal, Consensus Planning) gave a presentation on the purpose of planning and the comprehensive plan, comprehensive plan elements, guiding principles for public outreach, the project timeframe, and the key takeaways from the community survey currently underway. Following the presentation, participants were invited to share their views of Taos County framed through a series of questions. The following is a summary of the responses to those questions.

DISCUSSION

Question #1: How would you describe Taos County to someone who has never been to Taos County and was thinking about moving here?

- Rural agricultural community
- Acequia culture
- Protective of land and water
- High-desert farming
- Beautiful
- Amazing geological features.
- 100% daytime solar with lots of sun
- Clear air
- Clean water
- Great weather
- Outdoor recreation
- Tourist destinations
- Funky
- Great music and art scene
- Blue / Liberal
- Progressive on renewable energy
- Progressive on women's' rights
- Unique history
- Many retirement and second homes

- Welcoming community
- Accepting community
- Old culture
- Historically significant
- Multi-cultural
- Social and cultural relationships are difficult to understand
- Don't bring values from elsewhere to and try to impose values on the community
- Challenging to make a living
- Experiencing gentrification
- Challenging place to raise a family
- Education needs improvements
- Not enough to engage children and young people
- High cost of living
- Lack of jobs on the county level
- Lots of national forest and BLM land
- Beautiful, wide open spaces
- Sense of primordial
- Ancient cultures
- Don't ruin ancient running trails, acequias and cultures that are already under threat
- Developed without consideration about what was already here
- Problems run deep with the water, soil, and land
- Kind community
- Magical skies, energy, and sunsets
- Caution that there is a baffling mix of community dynamics; they must accommodate themselves or they could experience internal conflicts
- Don't want more people to come here and don't want more development that will come here and destroy it

Question #2: What are the three most important aspects of Taos County that should be preserved for the future?

- Acequia culture
- Irrigated pastureland
- Traditions
- Green belt no build
- Water preservation, catchments, because of climate
- Open spaces
- Wildlife
- Cultural heritages, respect for multi-diverse
- Indigenous cultures
- Protection of public lands
- People that live here today
- Environment
- Water, water, water

- Pueblos are the priority; ancestral ways and rights must be given back, such as the running trails; prayers have been going on for thousands of years here, we need to accept the past and bend our ways to allow the pueblo cultures to survive
- The views and the lands
- People and way of life
- Ability to enjoy the open spaces and national forests
- Development on the most minimal scale. Most primitive scale
- Water is the most important and it is life here; if development is unchecked, we will all suffer
- Awareness of cultural values
- Integrity of the landscapes
- Patterns of development are greatly diversified because of the cultural economic history; it is very intertwined and is different than in generic American groups
- Slower pace of life which is good for connecting to your neighbors and creating community
- Architectural terraces are very different; this area has a unique architectural identity that needs to be preserved

Question #3: What are the three most important aspects of Taos County that should be changed or improved?

- Condition of roads
- More diverse economy, less dependence on tourism
- Regulations on short-term rentals
- Educate youth to understand the beauty of surroundings
- Less trash
- More sidewalks
- Bike trails
- Bring back the recycling center
- More community services
- Mental and behavioral health services
- Support for caregivers of children and elderly
- Improved public schools
- Improvements in public health
- Too much reliance on gov handouts; need to generate GRT through commercial development, if no commercial no tax revenue
- Forest industry should be improved upon; need to bring back the forest industry that can stimulate the water shed and develop forestry services
- Lack of participatory planning in the county
- Inequitable distribution within the county, most services go to the Town of Taos; places in the rural areas do not get input into the process
- Cars, fossil fuels; truck stop in Taos is ruining the town
- People living outside of the Taos cannot get into town for groceries because they have no transportation; the County will get no feedback from those people, they do not get the same number of services; for example, there is no community center on the westside where people can get information
- Jobs are focused on Taos Ski Valley, impact of water usage on the full county

- Taos County - no land use until 1995; western side of County is very different, the water is different on the west side; the area has quadrupled in development, but it is hard to find an open well
- In District #5, the main priorities are wind, water, land rights, and people
- To create change, there needs to be clear metrics to convince people it is needed
- Safe bike lanes on the roads
- Water - growing food; preserving agriculture is scary, need to improve conditions in the valley to preserve rural way of life
- Explore alternative ways of development and building; have a study on whether we want to bring in more mobile homes and parks, why can we just go back traditional alternative ways of building?
- Traditional adobe building: we have an earth right here that provides materials, people have been fighting to get permitted; It is superior in heating and cooling than concrete, we can develop an international reputation as stewards of our land for the future utilizing those methods
- Accessible wastewater solutions, clean water solutions, compostable toilets
- Need to improve our resources and structure for recreational opportunities
- A comprehensive fire management plan is needed in coordination with the forest service
- More public spaces such as parks, places for people to live in the community, community gardens and meeting spaces located in neighborhood areas
- Public transportation that runs throughout the day
- Crime is higher than many expect
- Dialogue between cultures, we need more cultural discussions; healing is crucial because there is so much pain in the community

Question #4: It's now 2045, how would you describe Taos County to someone who is thinking about moving here? Please write it down on the cards provided.

- Back in 2024, Taos County made some radical decision regarding our future. They made water, environment/nature, and community their priorities. Now in 2045, we are one of the most beautiful and functional counties in the country. All new buildings must have roofs with rainwater collection. Solar is king. Bike lanes on every road. Wide open spaces. EV stations more than gas stations. Short-term "lottery" regulations that turn over every three years – allowing for affordable long-term rentals for the services industry population. Protected agricultural lands. We set a great and prosperous example for the world.
- They had a plan 20 years ago to make changes to improve life here but didn't budget or provide dedicated staff to implement it or fund it, so nothing changed except that climate refugees moved here to escape drought and heat from parts of the county that became uninhabitable due to the planet warming and set up habitation in the public lands we so fiercely value.
- Taos is a place where visitors and new residents can come to learn about and respect cultures, they knew little about before Indigenous, Spanish, Chicano, to realize America is a lot older than they knew. It is a place of incredible beauty that inspires people and is being managed to preserve that beauty. There is a healthy balance between preserving traditional culture and new jobs and sustainable industries that have arrived in the area.

- Taos is a place where diverse cultures dialogue with each other and seek the good and the healing of one another. A world for the rest of the country.
- Taos got gentrified. Developers here changed the landscape it used to be an art colony. It looks more like Cerillos Road.
- It's a clean city with low crime. Buildings are beautiful and representative of care for environmentally engaging sustainable living at a maximum level. Off grid houses, water is used several times before it is done. There are bike trails along rivers and many places to hike and explore. Recycling is the standard in our community. Trash and litter are a non-issue here. A tiny house community is thriving here with communal gardens. Culture and history are a priority here. Dialogue and respect abound.
- Walkable communities throughout Taos County. Places to gather in each community. Activities to celebrate the seasons. More agricultural community gardens. Planned communities with multiple types of housing in each area. Small homes, medium sized, homes and larger homes, condominiums. Multiple types in the same community. Shopping, working, playing, in walkable communities. Walking trails. Planned communities, not just environmentally conscious planning and development.
- Welcome to Aspen (not what I want).
- The residents of Taos in 2045 will look back on the Taos County of 2024 wistfully, knowing that their present-day community lacks many of the qualities that made it a good place to live. It is quite likely that by 2045, Taos County will have a population roughly twice the population of 2024 – in the range of 60,000 to 70,000. Development will mostly be in the areas currently populated: between Llano Quemado on south, Talpa and Canon on the east, to Arroyo Seco in the north, with some increased density going towards Arroyo Hondo, then back down to Los Cordovas and back to Llano Quemado. What I'm saying is, basically land ownership patterns will cause settlement to mostly concentrate in existing areas through infill. The infill will follow existing patterns, 60-65% manufactured housing, 35-40% site-built housing. There will be a marked diminution of irrigated farmland, and the network of roads will continue to be awkward and will not reach most residential areas without congestion and slow travel. Commercial areas will still remain concentrated and wealthy enclaves will remain isolated from the bulk of the general populated areas. There will continue to be cultural and social segregation. The water resources will be strained by increased population and there will be more multi-family housing, by necessity. There will be significant social tensions between long term residents who have their networks and relationships and recently arrived "newcomers" who are not invested in the community.
- Taos County has been able to improve its education system, so students leave high school knowing how to read and write. People will want to stay in Taos because of the embracing of innovation that permeates the community. Adobe construction abounds and people are able to earn a living wage and able to build their own homes again. Sustainable architecture.
Abundant opportunities for our children who will want to stay in our community.
- Taos has been urbanized and gentrified. It does not have the diversity that existed 20 years ago. Water is in short supply and much of the formerly irrigated land is now dry and not capable of growing crops. Climate change has resulted in less snowpack and spring runoff for irrigation.

Dreaded non-native vegetation has crowded out native species. Chinese elm and Russian olive have proliferated because many believed shade was more important than eliminating them and propagating. On the positive side, some traditional communities worked to preserve our cultures and lifestyles as there are small pockets of “Old Taos” that still exist.

- Taos County shaped a better future because it: 1) Paid attention to the gap between rich and poor; 2) Gave its youth a voice in its “adult” conversations; 3) Worked hard to both mitigate and adapt to climate change; 4) Moved beyond a culture of individualism to one of the common good.
- With a thoughtful eye to the future, Taos County has avoided the errors and mistakes made by other dominant / famous areas with ski resorts such as Vail/Eagle County. It has maintained its cultural heritage and world class art status while also improving the water, road, and healthcare infrastructure and keeping alive its traditional agricultural base.
- One day in the 2020’s we kind of collectively woke up, for the last 20 years we have successfully preserved some of the essential elements that help Taos to “stay Taos” ... water, cultural diversity, rural-agrarian, values, respect for the past, while alerting inevitable changes with an appropriately skeptical outlook. To someone that would want to move here, “Bring a sense of humor; we are all here because we’re not all there.”
- Maintained historic areas. Water settlements working well. Young, interested persons elected to Taos County Commission, Continued involvement by community members in issues government – local and national.
- Have we avoided catastrophic fire? Are more self-reliant, especially concerning producing food. Do we have neighborhood services; grocery, health, transportation without cars? How do people connect?
- Diverse, very cultural people who value their heritage. Sleepy, not much going on. Native people don’t get involved. Hopefully at that point on the road to being self-supporting.
- Education is culturally diverse. Commercialism is prevalent while Taos’ natural beauty is still shining through. There would be centers for youth and more affordable childcare. Higher livable wage paying jobs. Forests preserved.
- Come to Taos County where we have preserved our rural living and historic culture. Don’t come if you don’t embrace continuing this.
- Community gardens, soil restoration. Prospects and businesses up and down the Valley. Operating to benefit the restoration of soil and water. Communities and co-operatives. Building together alternative housing focusing on like interests. Green, green, green. Everywhere with music, and an abundance of food.
- A unique traditional community that was successfully maintained and honored. Taos very unusual and specific historical and cultural heritage. That Taos is internationally known for, in a manner that honors and supports local people with a high quality of life for present and future generations. Future should be the result of thoughtful planning that maintains and advances Taos unique arts and cultures, agriculture, water heritage, and natural beauty.

- Taos modernized its rural economy to address key issues like: green energy, high paying tech jobs, affordable and sustainable housing.
- In the future - Taos is distinct from other American towns. The people are positive and open. They can live full and safe lives because of strong family and community bonds built on a distinct culture and active way of life. They are involved in maintaining community gatherings and celebrations. There are a wide range of economic opportunities for young adults. Careers are possible.
- Unfortunately, unless we in Taos decide in 2024 to step up towards a really cooperative community model, I fear that in 2045, Taos will be dominated by wealthy upper class “Anglos” and be a community that talks about how good it used to be.
- I misunderstood the questions. A gentleman in the audience asked “Question, this is what I would like to see?” The question wasn’t phrased that way, so I thought the answer would be the inevitable, disruption, degraded social environment that likely awaits us, given the trajectory of humanity – because Taos, though unique and not like the rest of the U.S., or even the rest of the State, is subject to the same forces that gnaw away at the human spirit, self-determination, the quest for meaning and integrity, that are a pox upon humanity in general. But to take a Pollyanna-ish utopian vision of what I’d like Taos to be in 21 years, here are a few things to hope for:
 1. A continuance of the acequias as viable social and political structures, both as water delivery systems, and as a means of community organization for continued collaborative division of labor and sharing of resources.
 2. The continued viability of languages that have been nurtured in the Taos Valley, Tiwa and the unique idiom of Spanish that has been shaped by life in the Valley with inputs from many other Indigenous languages of the region. The survival of languages is essential to the survival of the culture.