



The Government Affairs Committee of the Taos County Chamber of Commerce requested the candidates for the Town of Taos Mayor and Town Council answer one additional question to be shared with the Members of the Taos County Chamber of Commerce.

Candidate Responses to Question:

If elected to the position for which you are running, what are you specifically going to do to support existing, local businesses grow and develop in our community?

Answer from Dan Barrone, Candidate for Mayor

I would continue with the momentum we have.

- By broadening efforts with the Tourism department and the Events Director, to work collaboratively with local businesses to promote Taos to travelers through cooperative marketing.
- Continue to focus on hiring local businesses to expand our marketing team so more dollars get spent back in to the community where they make a difference.
- I find that it is important to expand the social media presence by partnering with local businesses to showcase our diverse retail, culinary and adventure businesses to travel writers, social media influencers and the media.
- We are presently introducing the Taos Pueblo room back at the Visitor Center, this has evolved as a result of collaboration with the Taos Pueblo.
- I would love to see an interactive art exhibit at the Visitor Center sponsored by the Paseo Project to help promote the arts we have in our community.
- I would continue to support the "Shop Local" efforts. By supporting the free holiday parking and by expanding parking.
- I would continue supporting local, grass roots initiative like First Fridays and First Saturday Art Walk.
- Encourage and support local businesses to piggy back on Town's larger events, by creating event-specific opportunities for local businesses like the Big Barn Dance Art Stroll.
- Create partnerships with local businesses for events. For example – a shop local incentive for the community during the Lighting of the tree event.
- Support the creative economy - reorient economic development incentives to focus first on expanding existing businesses.
- I would encourage collaboration with the owners of the empty store front to create incentives to new business or existing businesses to occupy these spaces.
- I would encourage more events like the Chamber's Taste of Taos and business Expos to help promote different businesses.

I am always open to suggestions. I find it necessary to have collaboration in all efforts. We are bringing people in to our community by the thousands, placing them at the doors of our merchants. Some open them graciously and other may need to be educated and encouraged to taking advantage of the opportunities that are placed in their path. I will be there to help in this effort. I will continue to move forward in a direction that I feel best serves the majority and brings Taos to a better economic level. As Mayor and business owner I love working with those that are willing to help aid in effort needed to grow their business. It is not my efforts alone but a team effort that creates success. I look forward to continuing the work. I ask for your support. Put your trust in a proven leader Re-Elect Daniel Barrone for Mayor.

Answer from Darien Fernandez, Candidate for Mayor:

1. Procurement. My administration will better publicize our requests for proposals, and encourage local businesses to apply. We will conduct training on the procurement process so that our small business owners are better able to navigate the system. We also will prioritize local businesses when we make our purchases and contract awards, consistent with efforts by the State Auditor's Office to reduce money leakage by keeping more money local.
2. Technology. My administration will update our website and develop or purchase a phone app that will make it easier to submit applications, renewals, and schedule appointments with the planning department and fire inspector.
3. Streamlining the process. My administration will empower a committee of local small business owners to work hand in hand with my administration to identify ordinance and other policy and procedural changes that will make it easier for entrepreneurs and business owners to do business in the Town of Taos.
4. Access. My administration will make sure that every entrepreneur, every business owner, has equal access to staff. Favoritism leads to the impression that backdoor deals are being made, and scares off developers who otherwise might be willing to invest in our community. By giving equal access to everyone, and including the public along the way, we build consensus about the type of growth and economic development needed to address the 62 empty storefronts and increasing unaffordability in Taos.
5. Vision. My vision is to build on what we already have to create new job opportunities in agriculture, small manufacturing, tech, health care, education, and the film industry.
6. Accountability. I will hire an economic development director to coordinate this, so my new town manager can focus on a back-to-basics approach to municipal operations. Find out more at www.fernandezforyou.com

Answer from Melanie Baca, Candidate for Town Councilor:

One way to maintain and grow local businesses but not limited to is:

Focusing on the local businesses in Town like Plenish Skincare, Taos Mountain Energy Bar, and Private Label Select by growing and harvesting natural, organic and wild-crafted herbs, essential oils, and minerals. This is currently an in-demand industry with the potential to thrive. It's used in all-natural soaps, skincare products, cosmetics and many other natural and organic products.

Some ways we can establish it:

Is to work with local land owners to provide land/rent out land for small scale farming, or establishing a greenhouse garden in town.

We could partner up with UNM-Taos, and other Taos schools to provide training with incentives like college/High School Credit, or a certificate.

There are established organizations, and grant money that can assist us through the process.

Because it's Semi-Skilled/Skilled people can be paid higher wages.

This is an opportunity to help these thriving businesses in Taos avoid outsourcing their material. In turn, this keeps more money in town. While this is only one of my solutions, it is a way to bring in more local jobs, and local revenue.

Focusing on other local businesses:

The key is moving away from relying on tourism by providing products and services for a more local clientele.

We don't have to give up our tourism industry, but it shouldn't be our focus. (Consider the current climate changes.)

Safety:

WE as a council should be working on some solutions to keep our businesses, and owners safe as well.

One solution for this could be:

Partnering up with UNM-Taos' Criminal Justice, Sociology, and Forensic students and our police departments to create or provide internships with REAL life experience patrolling, and other duties within our departments, that could ultimately beef up our numbers.

My solutions are not set in stone, nor are they my only ones. Remember one KEY aspect to it all. Our COMMUNITY should also have input. If these solutions don't work now, then I'm fully equipped to bring in more solutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to answer this 😊

For more information on why I want to be on Town Council please visit my campaign page for more information:

This article touches a tip of the iceberg as to what makes me qualified.

<https://bacaforoffice.com/why-do-i-want-to-be-on-council/>

Answer from Judi Cantu, Candidate for Town Councilor:

As a property manager, I try to cater to tenants who have businesses that are not dependent on tourism but cater to the needs of the locals who will sustain them year around. Taos is open for so many opportunities for the entrepreneur. I have hardly had a chance to participate in the last four years and through a misogynistic administration have run into walls at every turn. I have my own ideas as to cultural events, yard sale tourism, having meetings with landlords on rent control. We don't want to kill the goose that lays the golden egg by the exploitation of Taos. We must keep it authentic, cultural and traditional. We never had a problem as we are having now by the over marketing and perhaps to the wrong market. We must diversify our market so as not to be so extremely dependent on tourism or skiing. We need industry that will support locals who will support the businesses of Taos.

Answer from Andrew Gonzales, Candidate for Town Councilor:

I would look into the needs of those existing local businesses and see if there are ways to help them access State and Federal funding to aid them in getting to that next big chapter of their business success. The Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) offers opportunities tied to job creation and business growth, and there have been a few success stories in the Taos area that have been able to take advantage of LEDA funding. This of course would take involvement from the local businesses in identifying their potential opportunities to access funds.

Answer from Fritz Hahn, Candidate for Town Councilor:

As the Council's representative on the Inter-Governmental Council, (IGC) we are looking at regional economic development organization and initiatives. Discussions are underway to create a Council of Governments, akin to the Landfill Board, that will enable State & Federal support for economic development. Still in its infancy, other initiatives include:

- 1) Creating a micro-loan "Grameen" style cooperative business bank. This kind of bank considers other factors other than the straightforward credit rating, collateral, etc. and is funded by the members of the co-op. Loans are typically small with low interest. For example when we started Taos Herb Co. 35 years ago it was with just such a micro-loan of \$3,000. Today the homegrown business employs 15 with revenues in the millions.
 - 2) Contacting our local legacy business owners and explore their plans for transitioning ownership upon their retirement by considering (in an attempt to keep the business locally owned) the ideas of employee ownership and/or a co-operative venture.
 - 3) Yet another initiative is the Town's efforts for Mainstreet designation - a State program designed to reinvigorate downtown businesses with consultation and funding opportunities.
 - 4) Providing quality infrastructure (roads, water, etc.) not only benefits our citizens but will naturally attract businesses to Taos and reinforce those that are here.
 - 5) A farmer's herbal co-op warehouse could aid, help coordinate and reinforce the wild crafting traditions by creating a regional/national wholesale market for those yerbas that are indigenous to northern New Mexico.
 - 6) As acequia revitalization occurs kitchen gardens and once fallow lands will augment food sustainability and with outlets like the Farmer's Market enterprises both small and large will benefit. Revitalizing our acequias will lay the groundwork to establish meaningful cash crops (quinoa, precious oils, marijuana) affording young families additional opportunities to use their family's intergenerational lands and with that the possibility that the demographics could begin to stabilize.
- I'd be remiss were I not to mention the hard work of the Taos County Economic Development Corp., (TCEDC) as they assist entrepreneurial start-ups.
- 7) The Town will continue to facilitate CDBG Economic Development (LEDA) initiatives.
 - 8) Continue to enact the Leap Partners "Community Economic Development (CED) Report and Action Plan".
 - 9) 'Unlock' land-locked lands at the airport to encourage small start-ups at our \$24m airport.
 - 10) Continue to pursue complete broadband coverage.

Answer from Sarah Lopez, Candidate for Town Councilor:

Taos has a unique downtown full of small business that captures our way of life, expresses our local interest, and intrigues our guests. There are certain events that spike economic gain more than others — I propose finding a healthy balance between events like First Friday, Farmers Markets, Taos Plaza Live, and large concerts like Dwight Yoakum. I'd like to see more revenue and tourism come in while keeping our community clean and cared for. I'd like to explore certain tax incentives that would benefit our small business owners. I believe creating alternative transportation options (bike paths) could help locals and visitors more easily get to the heart of Taos. I'd like to see economic growth while maintaining the integrity of our community- listening to and supporting our small business owners is a way to achieve this goal.

Answer from Michael Santistevan, Candidate for Town Councilor:

I am extremely committed to the success of small business in Taos. I will encourage training and guidance for existing business owners through partnerships with the Town of Taos and other organizations like the Chamber, UNM, SBDC and others. The Town of Taos is unique in its ability to secure CBDG funds, Main Street, streamlining business licenses and other economic development assistance for local business development. Together we can move forward and help businesses thrive.

Answer from Pascualito Maestas, Candidate for Town Councilor:

Keep money local - every time a purchase is made in a corporate store or online, our local money supply shrinks. Most believe that we need to do more to bring money into our local economy. While this is true, we must also stop the flow of money out of Taos. To improve the local economy, we must have a net inflow of money. I believe we can do this a few different ways.

1. Local Agriculture - A family of four spends about \$200 per week on food. In Taos, the majority of that food is grown or produced elsewhere, meaning our dollars are leaving our community. By promoting local agriculture, we can keep our money here. The circular flow of money will mean that after a few transactions, some of those dollars will begin to flow in all directions including toward local businesses that are not agriculture based.
2. Education - An educated, reliable work force is fundamental for business success. I will work with Taos Municipal Schools and UNM-Taos' Education and Career Center (TECC) to ensure that business have the workforce they need to be profitable. As a teacher, I understand the many challenges faced by our education system.
3. Minimum Wage Increase - A tiered increase with the largest businesses paying the increase first will improve our net flow of money without local small businesses bearing the initial cost. Many local businesses are already paying more than the \$7.25/hour federal minimum wage due to the upward wage pressure from the ski valley. Large employers are often maximizing corporate profits by minimizing personnel costs. When these large businesses pay a fair cost for labor, more money stays local and moves us closer toward net inflow. The circular flow of money would improve profits of local business before any increase in labor costs.

Bring money in - Tourism and government spending have been the main sources of incoming funds for Taos. Tourism has been on the decline, but we can reverse this trend by marketing to millennials. Millennials are now the largest voting block and are controlling more and more market share. As a member of this generation, I will share ideas with our tourism industries to attract younger tourists.

Lastly, I hope to align our economic policy with macroeconomic trends. We will see energy prices continue to rise as more people demand a shift away from fossil fuels. Our local businesses will have to compete with the likes of Amazon, Walmart, and Alibaba as multinational corporations continue to grow in size and economic power. We need to develop a response as a community to address the coming changes in the world economy as we become more and more integrated and globalized.

If you have any questions, please email me at votemaestas@hotmail.com to set up a meeting or call (505) 285-7755 (please call after school or leave a message, text is ok too!).