
Sample Op-Ed

New plan needed for Santa Fe

by Larry Delgado

On Thursday, April 29 at 8:30 a.m., at the Lensic Performing Arts Center, the City of Santa Fe will unveil its new economic development plan, written by AngelouEconomics (AE) of Austin, Texas. This plan is a roadmap that charts our city's economic development activities over the next five years. Its purpose is to improve Santa Fe's economic health, cultivate new target-industry businesses and provide new opportunities for all Santa Fe families.

Why do we need a new plan?

Our current economic development plan was adopted in June 1996. Since then, the City has created award-winning economic development and housing programs including the Santa Fe Business Incubator and Tierra Contenta. Although the 1996 plan was very successful, times have changed; and our current national and global economy requires new and innovative approaches to remain competitive. AE's extensive research indicates that our economy is showing signs of danger because we mainly lack business diversity and a young energetic workforce. The high cost of housing is a huge challenge to our young people.

The focus in many cities has shifted from recruiting large companies, to greater emphasis on improving local workforce, education, infrastructure and business climate to help local companies grow and new ones to emerge. Our goal is to achieve long-term economic health – an economy that benefits all businesses, residents and families. The strategies in the new plan are tailored and coordinated for meeting the city's long-term objectives.

During the last 12 months, AE has worked closely with Santa Fe leaders to compose an economic-development strategy for the region. More than 1,500 individuals and businesses were interviewed and/or surveyed to offer their impressions of the city's strengths and challenges and to learn more about what residents believe makes Santa Fe special. Santa Fe's community development division staff worked hard to ensure that the process was as inclusive as possible.

What does the new plan propose?

Based upon extensive research, AE has identified seven target industry sectors to help diversify our economy: Arts & Culture, Design, Hospitality, Conservation Technologies, Software Development, Publishing & New Media and Outdoor Gear & Apparel. These industry sectors match Santa Fe's strengths, as well as workforce requirements, trends and expected future growth.

The new plan offers specific recommendations aimed at increasing Santa Fe's potential for growing businesses within specific target industries and making overall improvements in the community. AE's recommendations fall into five categories: Workforce Development & Education, Entrepreneurship, Sites & Infrastructure, Community Development and Marketing.

These recommendations focus on improving our employment base by: expanding local companies; creating conditions favorable for entrepreneurship and local small businesses; increasing the value we place on education; coordinating workforce development activities and our ability to retain a talented workforce; and developing a marketing campaign that builds local and national awareness that Santa Fe is an excellent city in which to do business.

A strong economic development initiative has been laid out in the new plan. With a greater diversity of employment options comes a greater opportunity for residents to employ their unique talents and generate new wealth for every Santa Fe family.

I encourage all residents to join in and support this new plan at the Lensic Performing Arts Center on April 29 at 8:30 a.m. By working together we can ensure a sound economic future for our families and children. And I believe that, only by working together, can we retain Santa Fe's unique character and support the creative spirit of Santa Fe.

Larry A. Delgado is the Mayor of Santa Fe.