

Garden of Possibility in “planting” Trinity Site. By: Jill Cook

I look forward to daylight savings time each year. Not so much to lose an hour, but it signals that time of year when the weather turns warmer, grass begins to turn green, and nature wakes with buds and blossoms, in other words, it's SPRING. As Peter Sellers remarked in Being There, “Spring is the time for planting.” We have before us a garden of possibility in “planting” Trinity Site. If we follow through with careful tending, nurturing, and cultivation, Los Alamos can become a vibrant, buzzing, pedestrian-friendly destination.

The Trinity Site property is a very desirable 42 acre parcel across Trinity Drive from Mari Mac shopping center. The parcel is owned by the County and the Schools who have agreed to jointly investigate redevelopment of the area. A preliminary feasibility analysis indicates this site can support retail, entertainment and dining experiences in addition to office and residential units. Objectives that the County and Schools have outlined for redeveloping the property include: generating incremental revenue (above what needs to be spent to enable redevelopment), increasing shopping/entertainment opportunities for citizens, providing/increasing business opportunities to locally-owned businesses, maximizing the number of market and affordable housing units, creating a canyon rim trail for public access and enjoyment, and replacing facilities that have gone beyond their useful life.

The concept of redeveloping the Trinity Site has been a dialogue that dates back to 1965 when the "Daly" Comprehensive Plan, prepared with AEC funds to assist the LA Community in its transition from Federal to private ownership, recognized the temporary nature of the Trinity Drive facilities and proposed a redevelopment of the site. Since 1965, various Comprehensive Plans have all concurred in respect to the redevelopment of the site and several citizen committees since then have agreed with the redevelopment concept. Redevelopment of the property is a goal of the downtown plan which was adopted two years ago following extensive public participation processes.

Most recently, the County sent out a Request for Qualifications to identify developers interested in investing their time and money to redevelop the site. Five responses were received and interviews have been conducted with four of the prospective developers by a selection committee comprised of County representatives, School representatives, business leaders, and citizens. The committee will recommend their top candidate(s) to the County Council and a detailed proposal will be obtained. Only by obtaining and evaluating a detailed proposal can there be an evaluation of the ability of proposed redevelopment to meet the County and Schools' goals. The process will provide for ample public input prior to any final decisions on proceeding.

Development of Trinity Site would fill a need expressed continually by many who live here. As residents, parents, teachers, kids, volunteers we would like to have the opportunity to shop and enjoy entertainment experiences without having to leave the Hill.

This desire is backed by data from several community surveys; lack of shopping is cited year after year as the most undesirable attribute of living in Los Alamos.

But, what about our existing businesses? Do we develop Trinity Site in an effort to increase shopping and entertainment opportunities in one location to the detriment or demise of our existing businesses? Will we ultimately be hurting the local people who have invested their time, money and expertise in building their businesses? To gain a business owners' perspective, I asked two very prominent and successful business owners their thoughts around the development of Trinity Site.

Denise Lane, owner of Central Avenue Plaza and Hill Diner shared: "Businesses in Los Alamos are already competing with other businesses off the hill. Once our families leave on the weekend and drive 45 minutes or more to shop, all of our local retailers and restaurants are off their radar screen. If we offer shopping and entertainment options in Los Alamos, it becomes a more level playing field. Sure, people will still want to go on shopping excursions to Santa Fe, but it becomes a matter of choice not necessity. We can compete for people's dollars, increase weekend hours and justify investing more in our local businesses."

Dave Fox, owner of C.B. Fox offered the following: "CB FOX has always wanted more retail in Los Alamos and has repeated that preference in public meetings throughout the multi-year period during which the Trinity Site proposal has been on the public table. And nothing has changed-- CB FOX continues to want more retail here...lot's of it. And for the same reason that car dealers liked to be located so close together: sales go up. It's the critical retail mass effect. When new competition arrives, we will likely change our "mix" of merchandise to adapt to whatever mix of new retailers arrive. But that is not new for us; we've done it five times in our 27 years in Los Alamos. We already have as-yet unannounced plans for changes to CB FOX that should be good for the downtown area of Los Alamos that we occupy. Those plans may need adjustment, but not much, we believe. We are looking forward to Los Alamos becoming the more complete economy that it must become, and which, thankfully, the current County Council and its predecessor-Council have worked so constructively to bring about."

There is a bigger issue here too and that is one of self-sufficiency. County services are supported from revenue collected through property taxes and gross receipts taxes. For every \$8 collected in taxes, \$1 is collected through property taxes and \$7 is collected in gross receipts taxes. It is clear it would be impossible to raise property taxes on land owners in the County enough to support infrastructure: roads, water, and administration. Rather, increased revenues to the County need to come from gross receipts taxes.

Some people ask why Trinity should be redeveloped when we can't support the businesses we have here? A key problem, as is inferred in Denise Lane's and Dave Fox's comments, is the lack of anchoring retail and retail variety. Anchoring retail such as discount general merchandisers will give people a chance to meet a greater range of their basic needs here and a reason to choose to stay here to shop. Each of the developers

responding to the County RFQ for redevelopment of the Trinity property expressed their intent, if selected, to incorporate anchoring retail into their proposed project.

Residents want more shopping, businesses want more competition and the County needs to become self-sufficient. What can you do to help? Get involved, ask questions, give feedback. All of the information I've shared and more is available on the County's website at www.lac.nm.us or the Los Alamos Commerce and Development website at www.losalamos.org/lacdc. I close with a quote from Vita Sackville-West, poet/gardener, "The most noteworthy thing about gardeners is that they are always optimistic, always enterprising, and never satisfied. They always look forward to doing something better than they have ever done before." In the end, I hope you will support our County in growing a sustainable Los Alamos.