

## Trinity Site

By Bill Enloe, Chamber/LACDC Board and Chairman, Los Alamos National Bank

Los Alamos is facing a major decision on the future of the Trinity Site Project. We are at a critical stage in the process and how we choose to move forward will have many implications for the future of our town. It is an important project for the community that warrants careful public scrutiny and debate. It is critical that this debate be based on facts and not be distorted by personal preferences.

One of the first challenges is defining what the Trinity Site development is. Although this sounds relatively straightforward, it has been complicated by the County's discussions of building a new judicial complex and rebuilding the Municipal Building. Trinity Site is a proposal to make available for lease or sale approximately 43 acres, along the south side of Trinity Drive, for the construction of a mixed-use project that includes housing, retail and office space. Development of the Trinity Site Project is a separate issue and should be analyzed independently from the other two projects.

The Los Alamos Schools and Los Alamos County currently own the land. These two entities have entered into a joint agreement to pursue the feasibility of this project which provides for the County taking the lead on planning and developing the site. Currently, the project is in the review and due diligence stage. The feasibility analysis is being conducted by the Boyer Company, one of several developers who responded to the County's request for proposals. The Boyer Company was selected because of their experience and success with this type of project in similar communities. This review includes cash flow projections, design review, projected impact on the community and assessment of the long term sustainability. The Boyer Company is also performing due diligence to decide the type and quality of housing, retail and office space the market will support.

Neither Los Alamos Schools nor Los Alamos County is committed to the project, nor will a final decision be made until after the review process is complete. The Boyer Company will not commit to the investment until they are comfortable that the project will be successful and their investors will make a reasonable return. The development will be funded and financed by the Boyer Company, not the Schools or County. Boyer would also be paying the Schools and County for use of their land and the activities on the property would make substantial new contribution to County tax revenues.

If all of the parties involved choose to pursue the development, it will require the relocation of the Schools and County facilities currently at the Trinity location. They have chosen to build the new facilities at a site located at the end of the airport. This site has approximately 17 acres of usable land and will house a joint facility for buses, warehouses, equipment storage and maintenance. Although there have been estimates of the cost, the actual design and bids for construction have not been completed. The objective of this development is to improve efficiency, decrease building maintenance, and

provide room for future growth. The Schools and County can be expected to establish the reasonableness of the cost of these facilities compared to any other available options.

There are still many questions that are unanswered concerning this project and as the process continues they will become less speculative. I, for one, am optimistic that in the end the project will be feasible and the development will occur. I see this as a unique opportunity for investing in the future of our community. Los Alamos is at a critical point regarding the viability of our business community, and I fear continuing along the current path will lead to a community that relies almost entirely upon Espanola, Santa Fe, Albuquerque and the internet for our retail and service needs.

The importance of a vital business community affects everyone living in or visiting Los Alamos. The money generated from sales tax and property tax to support our schools and county services are the most obvious, but probably not the most important. The heart of a community is its business sector. Many activities that occur in the community involve and are sponsored by our businesses. Without them there is no focus or synergy. Los Alamos has seen business after business disappear over the last 20 years. This is an opportunity to reverse that trend.

LANL competes nationally with universities, business and other laboratories for employees and it is critical that we have a community that is alive and attractive for those individuals. Our retirees and young families need to be able to have access to goods and services without having to drive 40 miles or more to find them. Our current business base needs to be larger to create more incentive for Los Alamos residents, commuters and visitors to shop here. Housing is always at a premium in our community and the right mix of downtown residences could address some of our housing needs. New office space in a mixed-use project adds to the pedestrian traffic and reduces vehicle traffic. Increases in both of these areas are important to downtown viability. Trinity Site is the only location in Los Alamos which has sufficient traffic count and enough land to meet the requirements of many national retailers. Although national chains are not always desirable, the presence of the right mix of national retailers would make available many of the products that residents currently purchase out of town.

This project has been discussed and studied for years; we have arrived at a point where the final decision to move forward or stop is in sight. I applaud the School Board and County Council for involving the community in this process, their understanding of the issues facing Los Alamos and the cooperation they have extended each other to solve community-wide challenges. I believe that if this project is done correctly it will represent a turning point for the redevelopment of our downtown. As citizens of Los Alamos, I hope each of us is willing to compromise on our personal view of an ideal development for one that will be a major improvement for the town and will reverse the one-way flow of shoppers leaving town.