

The future of our communities, our land, and our values

A Summary of the 2020 Visions Public Forum Series

Change is inevitable. And so too seems to be growth here in Grant County. But *how* we change and *what kind* of growth we experience are questions we can help answer for ourselves, if we choose to.

In five forums from March to June of this year, GRIP's 2020 Vision series brought together community members, local organizations, and planning experts to discuss these questions in the light of the experiences of other communities, as well as to share our visions of the future and some ideas of how to get there. Hometown Initiative organized two related forums that provided an opportunity for more in-depth discussions.

Community Design for Active Living

Marni Ratzel, Bicycle and Pedestrian Planner for the City of Boulder, described how Boulder has built an infrastructure of separated paths and on-road bike lanes that supports human-powered transportation, active living, and the health of its residents. Also essential were city ordinances requiring bike racks when parking lots were built, bike lanes in new developments, and conservation of "greenbelts" linking different parts of the city. One result: 16 percent of all commuting in Boulder is done on bicycle.

Gail Ryba, former coordinator of the NM Bicycle Coalition, **Jamie Thomson** of the Bicycle Advocacy Group, and **Joe Hutto** of the Walkability/Accessibility Advocacy Group spoke about state and local efforts.

Healthy Environment as Economic Asset

Economist **Jennie Rice** explained how resource conservation efforts provide significant economic benefits to local communities. These range from nature-based tourism and tax savings from reduced sprawl to increased property values for homes located next conservation areas and the free provision of services such as reduced soil erosion and flood buffering.

Joseph Gendron, Silver City's Trails and Open Space Coordinator, discussed the town's efforts to preserve open space and develop greenways throughout the city, such as Boston Hill hiking trails and the possible San Vicente/Big Ditch trail. **Kevin Bixby**, director of the Las Cruces-based Southwest Environmental Center, presented ideas for developing Mexican gray wolf-based tourism in the Gila Wilderness.



Final forum participants share visions and practical ideas for encouraging renewable energy production and use in the area.

With turnout of 50 - 75 participants at each event, the forums demonstrated the great interest that community members have in these issues. And, as described on pages 3 and 4 of this issue, there continues to be a great deal of energy for moving forward on a number of fronts.

We provide here a brief summary of the individual forums and outcomes of the final community discussion. The first, in which Rebecca Carter of the Sonoran Institute described how some "gateway" communities have the different choices made by different communities and the different outcomes that resulted, was covered in our Spring 2005 issue and therefore is not included here.



Walkability advocate Joe Hutto poses in P.A. Creek, where it crosses under Silver Heights Blvd: future bike and hike path?

Local Energy Sustainability

As **Mark Sardella**, founder of Local Energy in Santa Fe, pointed out in our fourth forum, creative solutions do exist for communities that wish to reduce dependence on coal and natural gas as we enter the post-"Peak Oil" era. In Santa Fe, his group has a contract to use biomass to heat buildings. Other options include cultivating oil-producing algae crops and creating local utilities that use wind or solar electric generation. He cautioned, however, that it will be impossible to maintain our current level of energy use, even if all renewable sources are fully developed, so people will need to dramatically change their lifestyles.

Gordon West of the Jobs and Biodiversity Project described that local effort to use small-diameter trees cut from the forest for manufacturing and heating.

From Plans to Action: A Community Discussion

The purpose of the final forum was to prioritize activities that maintain and improve our quality of life and to identify actions needed to implement them. Skilled facilitation by planner Joanne McEntire helped us identify six areas for action: Community Cleanup; Community Radio; Local Energy Sustainability; Community Design & Land-Use Planning in Silver City; Food Self-Sufficiency; and Building a Bicycle- and Pedestrian-Friendly Community.

During a breakout session, participants in each of the six groups identified: 1) a goal for the group; 2) what resources are needed to reach the goal, 3) what resources are already in place, and 4) what actions can be taken now. A brief summary of each of the groups follows on pages 3-4.