

Executive Summary

Promoting Collaboration for a Sustainable Community:

A Critical Examination of Education, Immigration and the Local Economy in Santa Fe

June 1, 2006

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**SANTA FE
FUTURE 2006**

Introduction

When asked to identify the assets and challenges in of Santa Fe, community members repeatedly stated that our diversity was both an asset and a challenge. Our experience with Santa Fe Future offered many lessons as to how a groups of diverse people can work together to achieve a common goal. Perhaps the first, and foremost, of these lessons learned is that we must, as leaders, commit to listening and learning from others. The failure of groups to successfully collaborate can sometimes be owed to individuals coming to the group with pre-determined agendas to impose on others. A shared vision and the resulting action cannot be achieved if we do not authentically solicit and consider the ideas of each individual in the group. It is this process that also unveils the unique talents that each individual brings to the group; talents that must be leveraged to enhance both the process of collaborating and in accomplishing the shared vision of the group.

It is the purpose of this executive summary to provide a brief overview of our shared vision for the future of Santa Fe based upon what we learned by listening to individuals and groups in our community.

Focus Issues of Santa Fe Future 2006

While it is natural for factions and differences of opinion to exist within a community of approximately 145,000 people (Santa Fe County), serious and broad-reaching issues can only be resolved with substantial agreement on what the problems are and collaboration in working toward solutions. Many of Santa Fe's most serious challenges—and all three of SFF06's focus issues: education, immigration, and the local economy—are intimately related. This is good news, partly because it suggests that success in one area will yield benefits in others. More importantly, it is good news because it offers an opportunity for collaborative solutions, which have the greatest likelihood of success.

Our white paper focuses on promoting collaboration between individuals, organizations, and institutions in Santa Fe with a goal of creating a community that is truly sustainable. Central to the definition of a “sustainable community” is the idea of a community that is environmentally sound, economically prosperous, and socially equitable.

In our research we discovered that Santa Fe as a community faces a critical crossroads in its history. With such a wide range of talent and resources combined with progressive policies and a

high level of social consciousness of community members, Santa Fe has great potential to become a national model for sustainable communities. On the other hand, Santa Fe faces a median cost of housing that continues to increase alarmingly faster than the median household income, public schools that are more segregated than ever before, and a significant gap in student achievement between ethnic and socioeconomic groups. These factors and others serve as significant barriers to the health and quality of life in Santa Fe. In order for the community to become truly sustainable we must actively address the economic, social, and educational gap that continues to grow in our community.

Characteristic of moving towards a more “sustainable community” is recognizing the links between economic, social and environmental indicators. Traditional studies and measurements of change in these three areas tend to reflect an approach that treats them as if they operated independently, while sustainability approaches reflect the reality that these are tightly interconnected. The most effective way to identify areas of weakness and subsequent solutions, therefore, is an examination of the links between these sectors.

While our white paper presents what we learned about each of our three issues separately, we make recommendations that include interconnected approaches to seeking solutions. The following is a summary of our recommendations:

Education

- Develop magnet schools, each with a specific focus and expertise to allow parents to choose a school for their child based on their child’s interests and skills. This would also allow each school to develop strong programs in certain areas and community members to donate certain skills and resources depending on their particular interest.
- Require all schools to function within their operational budget given them by the district and encourage each school to be creative with ways to function within that budget.
- Close or merge schools that are unable to function within their operational budget due to low student enrollment and lease the property to provide a steady source of income for teachers salaries, operational costs, and other necessary services.
- Coordinate all community involvement projects, non-profit services, and other related service providers engaged in activities supporting education, through and/or reported by a central office like Curriculum and Instruction, so that this information is readily available for distribution to building administrators, teachers, and other support staff.

- Support a bilingual program that promotes dual-language acquisition of all children, rather than targeting only English Language Learners.
- Recruit and train bilingual educators with continued incentives, the development of learning cohorts, and collaboration with post-secondary institutions to provide on-site classes for these learning cohorts.
- Hire a full-time interpreter for the district.
- Provide on-going cultural competency training opportunities for all school personnel.
- Include more time for teachers and administrators to engage in professional development and collaboration outside of the school year/day.
- Collaborate with other organizations to leverage our schools as “community spaces.”
- Our community, city government, business and non-profits must continue to take an active role in reaching out and collaborating with both those who work in public education and those who are served by public education.

Immigration

- Increase educational programs that promote an understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of native Hispanics and the related connection to their Mexican descendants.
- Provide on-going dialogues, community forums, and educational speakers to create a greater understanding of historical, political, social and economic factors that define the issues related to immigration and opening confront the tensions that exist between cultural/racial groups.
- Sponsor events that celebrate the diverse cultural richness, appealing to both to residents and visitors alike; for example: “Mexican Summer,” Culture Days on the Plaza, El Grito de Independencia (Mexican Independence Day), Cinco de Mayo, and Los Dias de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead).
- Support an increase in workplace/community literacy programs for immigrant employees/residents.
- Utilize *La Voz de Nuevo México* as a valuable resource to communicate information, from schools, businesses, service providers and other organizations, to the immigrant population.
- Position ourselves as leaders in economic ventures targeting the needs of Hispanic immigrants and collaborate with resident immigrants and with businesses of Mexico to do so.
- Actively seek representation and input from the immigrant population in City government, organizations, boards, etc. and encourage all businesses, institutions and most especially service providers, to examine how effectively critical resources are communicated to the Spanish-speaking population.

Local Economy

- While continuing to support the tourism economy, the city must pursue greater economic diversification.
- Provide continued support and development of the City's Economic Development Plan, which includes the development of water conservation and clean energy industries, establishing Santa Fe as a major design center and goals for addressing issues in education and workforce development, community and neighborhoods, and affordable housing, with ongoing review and adjustment of goals as necessary, or as other opportunities develop.
- Take an honest look at city government and ask why it has acquired an "anti-business" label from a large part of the business community, and whether it is in the best interests of the community as a whole for an anti-business climate to exist.
- Reframe issues so as not to construct binary oppositions such as "business" versus "neighborhoods"; to create spaces for dialogues in which local business owners are recognized as part of the neighborhood and members of the neighborhood are recognized as essential to local business.
- Adopt a customer service program for city employees that provides on-going customer service training, promotes and rewards a customer service ethic among staff members, actively seeks ways to simplify and streamline procedures, and works to clearly communicate city requirements and procedures.
- Encourage and sustain a local business culture that recognizes community assets as worthy of consideration, and in some cases, assistance or protection.
- Create a collaboration between Santa Fe businesses, non-profit organizations, Santa Fe Public Schools (including charter schools), and Santa Fe Community College to develop and implement a merit-based internship program, meaning students must meet certain criteria with regards to academic performance to participate.
- Recycle local dollars by supporting programs like Locals Care, and organizations like Local Energy and the Santa Fe Business Alliance.

Universal Recommendations

- Invest in diligent, collaborative efforts on the part of significant numbers of Santa Fe's community and business leaders. Problems and solutions come and go, but if broad community support is important (and in a small community like Santa Fe, it clearly is), the process by which solutions are developed and implemented is as important, or more important, than the solutions themselves. To achieve that kind of support, we believe that process must include meaningful collaboration based on common goals.

- Investigate ways to implement at-large representation in city government, balancing district-focused representation with at-large representation in order to make significant progress in resolving larger-community issues.
- Allow the mayor to cast a vote in all council decisions, not only as needed to break ties. We believe the mayor holds a special responsibility to provide leadership that promotes a whole-community view in council decisions.
- Sponsor and support community dialogues between groups entrenched in oppositions as a means of providing a basis for the resolution of issues.
- Provide support for “grassroots” approaches with participants as experts of their own problems through project like the Middle Ground Project which seeks to create authentic, meaningful spaces for disparate populations to interact, discover the “middle ground” and together create positive change.
- Redefine the phrase “The City Different” in partnership with other organizations, to provide more meaning and vision for our community.

Promoting Collaboration for a Sustainable Community

While our white paper explores specific perspectives and recommendations for the future of Santa Fe, it is our overarching belief that we must find ways to promote collaboration for a sustainable community. Because there is a multitude of perspectives on what constitutes a sustainable community and how to achieve it, it is imperative that we continue our efforts to create and implement an inclusive vision for what constitutes a sustainable Santa Fe.

In 1998, the City Council created the Sustainable Santa Fe Commission, consisting of volunteers interested in discussing and researching some of the following questions:

- What might a “sustainable” Santa Fe look like?
- What might indicate that we’re moving in the right direction toward sustainability?
- What are city government and our citizens doing to make our community more sustainable? (Covington, 2005)

Sources of research included the city’s General Plan, the Economic Development Plan and over 20 additional documents to form recommendations on what sustainable efforts the community should invest in and a series of indicators for measuring sustainability. Much of this work was included in the City Economic Development Plan and a critical examination of Santa Fe and sustainability issues further explored in the publication “Sustainable Santa Fe: Balancing Cultures, Economics, and Ecology.” Central to definitions of “sustainable communities” is the ideas of

environmental soundness, economic prosperity and social equitability. It includes the notion that there are complex relationships that connect these issues and that to address these effectively requires participation of, and collaboration between, all sectors of the community to seek multiple innovative and integrative approaches.

The word “collaboration” has been misused to the extent that it has fallen into disrepute. Used in a variety of circumstances to describe almost any situation in which more than one person is engaged in any activity, its meaning has become obscured. Journalist Scott London, in a paper entitled “Collaboration and Community,” provides a meaningful definition for civic collaboration which serves as the framework for our discussion:

Civic collaboration is a process of shared decision-making in which all the parties with a stake in a problem constructively explore their differences and develop a joint strategy for action. The ethic of collaboration is premised on the belief that politics does not have to be a zero-sum game where one party wins and one party loses, or where both sides settle for a compromise. If the right people are brought together in constructive ways and with the appropriate information they can not only create authentic visions and strategies for addressing their joint problems but also, in many cases, overcome their limited perspectives of what is possible. (1995, p. 1)

Bringing together the “right people” to achieve this means engaging not only local leaders, but potential leaders that can represent groups traditionally under-represented when developing strategies for action.

We have discovered there is a great deal of talent, intelligence and creativity in this community and we challenge local leaders and would-be leaders to focus these resources on the ongoing process of bringing our community together to create the vision of what our community might be and to develop and implement strategies towards making this vision a reality. We feel that this vision must recognize the potential for Santa Fe to become a national leader in creating and building a sustainable community because of the multitude of non-profit organizations, diverse local businesses, as well as, environmental consciousness and social consciousness of our community members. We encourage the community at large to measure the effectiveness of our leaders by their contribution to developing and implementing such a vision.

References

Covington, Margo. (2005). Sustainable Santa Fe. *Sustainable Santa Fe: Balancing cultures, economics, and ecology*. Earth Care International: Santa Fe, NM.

London, Scott. (1995). *Collaboration and Community*. Accessed from Santa Fe Future Web site: http://www.santafefuture.org/download/ScottLondon_Collaboration.pdf