

Los Alamos County
State of the County Annual Report
January 4, 2022

In January 2021, the Los Alamos County Council identified seven strategic priorities; these were subsequently adopted on January 26, as outlined in the County's 2021 Strategic Leadership Plan. These priorities address issues important to the community that the Council agrees to focus and make progress on in the coming year; they represent multiyear challenges that require cross-cutting engagement and support. Additionally, progress in these areas will help enable the broader set of County investments, initiatives, and day-to-day operations currently underway.

For each of these priorities, concrete actions were identified and implemented. This report provides examples of progress in these areas and serves as a starting point for identifying focus areas for the coming year, pending broader discussion between the community, County staff, and Council.

In addition to progress on the Council strategic priorities, it is important to note two other significant areas for the Council. First, with former County Manager Harry Burgess' announcement of his retirement on January 12, Council formally started the process to find a new County Manager on January 28. The County was assisted by an executive recruiting consultant who supported Council on the process and timeline for hiring a new County Manager. Finalists for the position attended a community meet-and-greet event and then were interviewed by County Senior Management, community members, and the Council. Eight updates regarding the process and progress were provided to Council and the public between January and July 12, when the new County Manager, Mr. Steven Lynne, was appointed. This rigorous hiring process highlights the importance of succession planning for senior County staff.

Second, the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our community and the state have been and will continue to be significant, as they are nationally and globally. During the first half of 2021, the County's efforts focused on the emergency response to the pandemic by scheduling and coordinating vaccination clinics and community testing. Per the latest report from the Emergency Manager, Ms. Beverley Simpson, and as a measure of the success of the vaccination efforts in the County -- 93% of adults 18+ years old have completed both doses and about 49% of this population has received the booster dose. These fractions are substantially higher than the statewide fractions of 75% and 29% for the same doses. This speaks to both the interest and the availability of the vaccines in Los Alamos County. Continuity of County services and operations were also priorities throughout the year. Outreach to the community and determining ways to allocate Federal American Rescue Plan Act funds have also been important.

At the October 18 Council meeting, given that the pandemic was entering a new phase of long-term response based on chronic disease management, a COVID coordinator role was recommended as a single point of contact for ongoing communication and guidance, with an integrated County response, coordinated with the state and the region. It was recommended that data assessment lead to actions/options, including testing, contact tracing, and emergency

management responses – all emphasizing public health information. It was also recognized that outside resources may be needed as we proceed and work with others in the County, region, and state.

- **Enhancing communication.** Enhancing communication with the public to promote transparency and strengthen trust in County government.

With the success of the remote-only meetings in 2020, a mixture of hybrid (in person and remote) meetings were used to conduct County business in 2021. Given the public's strong preference for allowing remote attendance, County Council meetings will continue in a hybrid format in 2022. Board, commission, and task force meetings will generally continue in remote-only format as they allow for engagement for everyone with an Internet connection or phone line.

Town hall meetings were resumed using either hybrid or remote formats to discuss issues coming to Council. One was a town hall regarding options for supporting the local business environment and the other focused on the retail cannabis ordinance. Council agreed to schedule town halls regularly in 2022, with topics to be determined. The first town hall will be in mid-January 2022 to consider the vacant building registration ordinance scheduled for an initial public hearing on January 25, 2022.

To provide information to the community and hear from citizens, Councilors wrote letters to the editor regarding current topics of interest and were available for one-on-one discussions at the farmer's market. Councilors used the County's Open Forum platform for a non-scientific survey of public opinion as well as reading emails to Council, letters to the editor, and posts on social media. Community surveys were also conducted for the downtown master planning effort and the ongoing process to update the County development and nuisance codes.

Among the management changes for the County is a new Public Information Officer, Ms. Julie Williams-Hill, selected in November. Included in her priority tasks are an update to the County's website and a communications and engagement plan. The County also hired Ms. Danielle Duran as Intergovernmental Affairs Manager to strengthen communications and interactions with local, state, and federal government agencies.

Council started two task forces to obtain public input on topics of interest expressed in citizen petitions – Los Alamos Resiliency, Energy, and Sustainability and Racial Equity and Inclusivity.

The format of Council meetings was changed to promote public comment on all agenda items.

- **Increasing the amount and types of housing options.** This includes increasing the variety of housing options for all segments of the community, from affordable to new

options for those interested in downsizing or moving closer to central areas of the community, and pursuing opportunities for utilization of vacant spaces to address these needs.

Information provided by the independent Housing Market Needs Analysis for the County (completed December 2019) estimated the immediate need for 1,310 units of rental housing and 379 units for homeownership, including a particularly acute shortage of housing for low- and middle-income households. This immediate need identified in the Market Needs Analysis is in addition to approximately 600 units currently under development; these include affordable housing, market rate apartments, townhomes, and unattached homes.

Projects underway on formerly County-owned lands (all land transfers from Department of Energy [DOE]):

- Mirador Subdivision in White Rock. Additional permits were issued for single-family homes. Planning and Zoning Commission has approved the site plan for a mixed-use development (57 apartments and 1100 square feet of commercial use space). Developer will be submitting for building permit in 2022 on the mixed-use development.*
- Canyon Walk Apartments. 70 multifamily units were constructed under the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program. Project is nearing completion with certificates of occupancy expected soon.*
- The Bluffs Apartment. Ground has broken for a senior housing rental development of 64 units under the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program.*
- The Hill Apartments. Ground has broken on 35th street (at the old LASO site) east of the hospital for 149 market-rate apartments.*

A report is due in spring 2022 on the investigation of the Middle DP Road Site. This report will inform future development of infrastructure and utilization options for other land on DP Road previously transferred from DOE to the County.

As part of our FY2022 Federal legislative priorities, it was requested that DOE evaluate viable land transfer options to address Los Alamos National Laboratory and community needs. The County continues to prioritize the environmental cleanup of key land transfer parcels in addition to the other high-risk cleanup sites identified in the Consent Order.

The Los Alamos Public Schools and the County continued public engagement to identify options and important elements of a desirable workforce housing development that would also provide a revenue stream for the Public Schools on their North Mesa property. This culminated in the Schools and the County signing a Memorandum of Agreement authorizing the County to spend up to \$475,000 from a State capital improvement grant to produce, with continued public input, a detailed conceptual site plan and financial feasibility analysis for achieving both of these goals.

On October 29, Council passed Resolution no. 21-30, declaring the hotel structure, commonly referred to as “the Hilltop House,” located at 400 Trinity Drive, Los Alamos, a menace to the public comfort, health, peace, and safety and ordering removal of the hotel structure and associated ruins, rubbish, wreckage, and debris from Los Alamos County by March 30, 2022.

On November 16, a vacant commercial building registration ordinance was introduced with a public hearing scheduled for January 25, 2022. The ordinance provides for vacant building registration, with associated fees, as well as an enforcement mechanism.

A short-term rental housing ordinance is under development. Council received a briefing on this issue at the October 26, work session.

- **Protecting and maintaining our open spaces, recreational, and cultural amenities.** Los Alamos County open spaces and cultural attractions are greatly valued by the community and provide opportunities for recreational and economic growth; appropriately allocating resources to ensure their health and sustainability is important to our citizens.

FY2022 budget options were approved for open space (one-time capital cost for a vehicle to support open space maintenance, recurring funding for habitat restoration work), park master planning, and design work for new tennis courts. Support for virtual library services and increased funding for virtual library collections were also approved FY2022 budget options. Funding was also approved to purchase bear-resistant roll carts for the entire County.

Projects to improve or construct multiple recreational amenities continued in 2021.

- *Leisure Lagoon. A new building addition to the Larry Walkup Aquatic Center, including a zero-entry pool, lazy river, spray features, and a slide. Construction is approaching completion in early 2022.*
- *Golf Course Site Development Improvements and Amenities. Options for this project will be considered in early January 2022.*

The Women’s Army Corps (WAC) Dormitory on 17th Street (purchased by the County both to preserve this historic World War II building and to help create new opportunities for insights into the Manhattan Project). A contract has been awarded to investigate application for historic status for the building and to perform outreach to public and stakeholders. Community outreach and engagement will help the County determine how best to restore and utilize this building, for example, as a part of the Los Alamos historic walking tour.

The County continued development of an updated and integrated trail and transportation strategy. This will include working with Los Alamos National Laboratory and their trails planning efforts as well as identifying key links with regional

transportation to/from surrounding communities. While this effort is underway, the County has also been investing in existing trail and pathway facilities (see discussion under infrastructure).

The County has been working with Los Alamos Public Schools on three joint recreation projects: including a multi-use gymnasium on the Middle School site on North Mesa, and a multi-use gymnasium at a school site in White Rock. Both of these projects have received State funding to support design work. Cooperative County-Los Alamos Public School options for enhanced tennis court facilities, sufficient to host tournaments in one location, are also a topic of discussion.

At our December 14th meeting, we directed staff to return with a proposed path forward to eliminate the use of glyphosate-based chemical pesticide controls. Council also formally adopted integrated pest management as an overall County policy.

- **Enhancing support and opportunities for the local business environment.** This includes appropriately supporting existing businesses, growing new businesses, supporting technology start-ups and spin-offs, and identifying opportunities for utilizing vacant space as a part of these efforts.

For calendar year 2021

- *Commercial Building Permits Issued: 104*
- *Residential Building Permits Issued: 779*
- *New Business Licenses: 148*

The Downtown Master Planning effort for both Los Alamos and White Rock was initiated in June 2020 with broad community outreach and engagement. There has been significant commercial development interest and much of both commercial and housing development will be taking place in our downtown areas. The plans for Los Alamos and White Rock were approved by Council in August.

An update and reconfiguration of the County development code that governs commercial, residential, and mixed-use development and redevelopment is another aspect of the Downtown Master Planning process. The code update is underway and will help the community achieve its downtown goals, will be easier to use and apply and will support discussions with investors regarding the community's development and use priorities for our downtown areas. An update to the County's outdoor lighting ordinance to incorporate guidance provided under the Dark Skies initiative is also anticipated as part of these efforts.

The White Rock Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) was approved by Council on June 8, designating the boundaries of the proposed MRA District and authorizing the development of an MRA Plan. After the plan is developed, projects can be evaluated for possible approval.

Changes to the Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) ordinance were approved on July 27 and discussions on the evaluation criteria and types of projects preferred by Council were considered at subsequent Council meeting in August. Council received a briefing on the status of County LEDA projects on July 6 and subsequently the agreement with Pebble Labs, Inc. was terminated. The termination was mutually agreed upon given the terms of the agreement could no longer be met, and land was returned to the County.

Council approved ordinances to allow cannabis businesses in commercial zoning districts (cultivation and manufacturing on September 28 and retail on December 7).

Sales of County-owned land for economic development purposes:

- *3661 & 3689 Trinity. An ordinance was approved to sell two lots on Trinity Drive to a local business, Pet Pangea.*
- *1010 Central Ave. Construction was completed by Los Alamos Public Schools Credit Union with an opening date in June.*
- *Marriott Hotel and Conference Center. The developer requested postponement of the completion date from November 2023 to August 2024. This request was denied by Council on December 14.*

Other initiatives were discussed with substantial public input, but Council approved no other economic development ordinances.

- **Supporting social services improvement.** Behavioral, mental, and physical health and social services are important quality of life components; there are key areas where appropriate types and levels of County support could help address current needs.

County Social Services moved into a new location on Diamond Drive across from Los Alamos High School for better coordination with the services provided at Health Commons by NM Department of Health and the County health services contractor.

With funding approved for investigation and conceptual design of a Tween Center (grades 6-8), that complements the Teen Center and Youth Activity Centers, efforts focused on development of a Request for Proposals (RFP). The RFP would include evaluation of site locations close to the downtown amenities, building costs, and program development costs. No RFP was issued in 2021. Additional outreach to the community's youth and other stakeholders is needed to move the project forward in 2022.

Members of the County Health Council, chartered at the end of 2019, met and proposed a process for developing a Comprehensive Health Plan, to monitor health and health care, advise on policies that affect health care, facilitate communication, and identify

resources to improve health, as required by NM Senate Memorial 44 and HB137. Council voted to move forward with the proposed approach at the December 14 meeting.

- **Improving access to high quality broadband.** Enabling reliable high-speed broadband service throughout the county by determining appropriate investments (e.g., conduct a community needs analysis, evaluate technical options).

During the budget process, Council approved a Broadband Manager position to be added for FY2022 and allocated \$500,000 in broadband design services to develop updated community broadband conceptual designs and costs analyses. This design work will provide multiple concepts for consideration by the community, county staff, and Council. Mr. Jerry Smith filled the Broadband Manager position. He will be discussing next steps towards achieving the goal of improving access to high quality broadband.

- **Investing in infrastructure.** Appropriately balancing maintenance of existing infrastructure with new investments in county utilities, roads, trails, expanded transit options, facilities and amenities, which will help improve environmental stewardship, sustainability, and quality of life, while allowing for sustainable growth.

A substantial portion of the County budget is dedicated to infrastructure improvements generally through the Public Works Department and the Department of Public Utilities (DPU).

An ordinance to make more funds available for utility infrastructure needs, by rejecting the annual profit transfer, was passed by Council in 2020. For the next three years, Council directed these funds (approximately \$820,000 per year) to be reinvested to accelerate critical upgrades to water line infrastructure. An update to this ordinance will be considered in January 2022 to better align with the DPU 10-year planning horizon.

Continued County participation in the next phase of development of the Carbon Free Power Project was approved on July 27; the County's investment is capped at \$1.26 million. The project is due to be completed in 2030; (at a 2020 levelized cost of \$58/megawatt-hour). In combination with other investments/contracts, this participation will support achieving the 2040 Electric Production Carbon Neutral goal.

Another substantial project is the White Rock Water Resource Reclamation Facility (WRRF) Construction Project. Council has approved funding for up to \$30,000,000 for this project. The award of the bid is scheduled for the January 4, 2022 meeting.

Road improvement projects did not slow down and continued as planned in 2021 with the following projects in design and construction:

- *Construction of North Mesa Road and Utility Improvements project*
- *Design of 33rd/34th Street Loop Roadway & Utility Improvements project*
- *Construction of Trinity Drive Safety & ADA Improvements project*

- *Design of Finch Street Connection project*
- *Construction of DP Road*
- *Design of Sherwood Boulevard drainage and road improvements (Grand Canyon Drive to Aztec Avenue)*

The County has pushed hard for the project to widen and improve the Truck Route and New Mexico State Route 4 intersection. This project will add capacity and help reduce traffic congestion. Additionally, the project will provide an access into Tsankawi with a future parking lot off the highway to further improve safety at this intersection. Construction is now planned to start in spring 2022. A project to improve the safety of State Road 4 between the intersection and White Rock is also being conducted by NMDOT with an engineering consultant currently in the study phase. The project will add shoulders to both sides of the road and is planned to start after the intersection project is completed.

New Mexico 502/ Trinity roadway and utility upgrades were accomplished through a cooperative agreement with NMDOT and were completed in 2021 after starting in 2019. The work completed in 2021 was some paving, landscaping and final touch-up work.

The County continues to collaborate on and fund projects that improve vehicle traffic flows as well as pedestrian and bicycle connections and safety.

- *Trinity Drive Pedestrian and ADA Improvements. Phase I improvements and repairs to sidewalks and curbs along Trinity Drive between Diamond Drive and Oppenheimer Drive, funded with a \$250,000 state grant, are complete. Phase II of the improvements, Oppenheimer Drive to 15th Street, is anticipated to be funded for 2023/2024 construction.*
- *Canyon Trail Underpass. Project was completed in 2021 to construct a tunnel underneath NM 502 connecting the eastern Canyon Rim Trailhead to Entrada. The evaluation of projects to improve the connectivity of trails within the County is underway.*
- *Urban Trail Corridor. Both phases of this multiuse path have been federally funded. Phase I will connect the Urban Trail to the Canyon Rim Trail at 20th Street and proceed through the Fuller Lodge lawn to Spruce Street. Phase II will pass through forested undeveloped landscape surrounding the Canyon Road tennis courts and terminate at the Aquatic and Nature Centers. NMDOT and environmental and cultural approvals, and engineering design started in 2021. Construction activities are anticipated between 2022 and 2024.*
- *Canyon Rim Trail Phase 3. The land acquisition process is underway with legal staff assisting with drafting the required documents to acquire the required land through easement. Final design efforts will commence once the easement acquisitions progress.*

During the January 2022 County Council strategic planning session, the status of the identified seven strategic priorities will be reviewed. Council will consider whether these are still the most important priorities for the community, identify any new high-level actions needed to continue progress on the priorities, and determine whether additional priorities are needed.

The results of the discussions will be incorporated into the 2022 Strategic Leadership Plan and will be used to maintain focus on important issues and help enable other ongoing initiatives important to the future of our community.