Update Report from Council Chair and County Manager

December 2, 2025

Local and Small Business Engagement Working Group of Council

The Local and Small Business Engagement Working Group of Council included Councilors Herrmann, Reagor and Ryti who met with interested individuals and groups through the year to gather feedback. The draft report of their efforts was presented at the August 19, 2025 Council meeting and their final report was presented on September 30, 2025 where the following motion was passed 7-0 to:

1) accept the Working Group Report as amended;
2) dismantle the Local/Small Business Engagement Working Group; and
3) ask Council Chair and County Manager to work on assignments and next steps as recommended in the report.

The report contained the following suggestions with current updates included in red:

1. Make advertising available to the small business community on Atomic City Transit busses, both local and the Bandelier route.
   Advertising on buses is not a program the County currently offers. In the near term, County marketing staff , Ellyn Felton and PIO office, have been working on developing and launching within the next month or two an online business directory where businesses can enter all their own current business information about their hours, what they sell etc. It is a searchable database for residents and visitors and a module that is provided by our website vendor Open Cities. The advertising goal is to include to market the QR code linking everyone to the directory with a "shop local" theme to be displayed in out buses, visitor centers and anywhere else that seems like a good opportunity to promote what local businesses have to offer.
2. Provide clear information about how to start a business in Los Alamos County and provide a clear point of contact to help. Create an outline of who is working on ED, and what their specific roles are and how to contact them.
   Economic Development staff have updated development handbook information on the County's website. The information can be more widely communicated thought the SBC and LACDC. Anita Barela was hired as the Economic Development Program Manager and is the point of contact and facilitator for business interactions with the County.
3. Track the timelines for LEDA and MRA applications closely and minimize turn-around times.
   LEDA applications received are being tracked by Anita Barela and updates will be provided in the monthly CMO Update presented to Council at their last meeting of every month.

4. Openings, closings and sales of local businesses, gaps, and available lands for development or redevelopment should all be tracked and regularly reported.

   The opening and closing of business licenses is a planned metric for our Community Dashboard update in January/February 2026. The LACDC is developing a land inventory and will be marketing the information through their channels of communication and interactions.

And further contained the following suggestions:

1. Recent changes to Retail LEDA are a great start. We need advocacy with legislature on this and anti-donation.
   Currently, there are not any active state legislative initiatives around anti-donation reform the County staff are tracking. It is on the Council's state legislative priorities to monitor this topic.

2. Consider the developable land on mesa in SF County east of East Gate Drive and other lands owned by Los Alamos County in Pueblo Canyon.
   Community Development Director Eli Isaacson has had conversation over the last few months with Santa Fe County staff. The next step would be for the County to make a proposal to Santa Fe County for consideration by their commission. This is anticipated to be a couple or several year discussion and process to navigate through.

3. Why are the pads at Smiths Marketplace not being developed yet? Kroger is still paying ground lease to schools, but we would like to see that space developed. This is not on the Assessor's list of vacant property. Is there a mechanism for County to get that land developed? We understand that Columbus Capital is currently engaged with Kroger regarding a sub-lease.
   These parcels are owned by LAPS and leased to Smiths/Kroger. The County does not have any land development entitlements to these parcels. County economic development staff and LACDC could meet with Smiths/Kroger and see if there are any ideas to partner on getting these parcels developed in the near future as a long term activity.

4. Consider engaging with local economic development professional groups like LACDC to help review the Retail LEDA applications. Could Council see all applications and not just the ones that are recommended by County Staff?
   In talking with LACDC Board and ED, their organization prefers to support and partner on applications rather than help County staff ensure they are complete and ready for Council consideration.

5. Continue partnering with Cities Work to review County processes. Coalition members brought up stacking of permits, which seems to happen for large projects, but not smaller ones. Could they also review Retail LEDA process and give suggestions?

Eli Isaacson has reached out to Cities Work a few times and was told the report should be available before the end of the calendar year 2025. A Council agenda item to discuss the report can be added once the report is received and distributed.

6. Is it possible or feasible to hire plumbing & electrical inspectors for Los Alamos County? This step seems to hold up progress of small businesses opening because we are so remote.

   There are a few instances where the state inspectors took longer than the County to respond, however there likely isn't enough work volume to add additional staff. This concept could be explored and discussed further at the 2027 budget hearings in April 2026.

7. Consider monument signs that businesses slip their own signage into.

   LACDC and Los Alamos MainStreet could consider this concept with their placemaking initiatives.

8. Our Change of Use process needs to be more transparent and faster. How can we improve this?

   The SBC, LACDC and Anita Barela are well coordinated on training and education about this topic after there were a couple of unfortunate circumstances where tenants signed leases before they spoke to the County about occupancy.

9. Is there a way to create a sense of urgency with regard to developing tourism to support and expand the local business community?

   The tourism working group that includes our economic development and tourism partners was reinstituted this year and is led by Ellyn Felton and Linda Matteson. Updates of discussions and activities will be included in the CMO Update presented to Council at their last meeting of every month.

10. The local procurement forum held by staff should be monitored and metrics tracked relative to the amount of business procured locally.

    The amount of County funds spent at local businesses is a planned metric for our Community Dashboard update in January/February 2026

11. Look for ways to facilitate professional services (architects, engineers, grant writers etc.) needed local businesses.

    This is a topic County staff have discussed with LACDC. Outside of LEDA and MRA or an affordable housing development with a development agreement with the County defining the public participation dollars and benefits, anti-donation is a barrier. SBC and Los Alamos MainStreet can connect businesses with state and federal grant opportunities when they arise.

The Local Business Coalition also made recommendations as follows:

1. Implement targeted initiatives to increase the availability of affordable commercial spaces and reduce vacancies.
   The County does not have a legal mechanism to restrict commercial space rental rates. The County can incentivize economic development through LEDA and MRA that will add inventory to market competition. The County is working to help with renovations and improvements though the LEDA -Retail program.

2. Simplify confusing permit processes, ensuring consistency and direct accountability.
   The County does not believe the local processes are overly burdensome and staff have worked to improve the website and staff communications about the processes. Anita Barela serves as the main point of contact for businesses seeking permits and we partner with LACDC to support businesses. The Council supported engaging with Cities Work earlier this year and are awaiting their report to consider future improvements.

3. Prioritize and provide financial support for housing initiatives targeting workers earning $15-20/hour.
   Two affordable housing initiatives have been approved this year – 9th Street apartments deed restrictions, A-8-A (over 200 deed restricted units to maintain affordability for income qualified residents and 240 market rates units at A-8-A). Two market rate housing projects will increase housing inventory and help temper market increases – Hills Apartments and 20th Street. The multi-family phase of Mirador and the North Mesa housing partnership with LAPS are future housing projects still in the pipeline for future developments.

4. Provide more direct support, grants, funding opportunities, and technical assistance to small businesses.
   See answer to number 11 above.

5. Strengthen communication channels and enhance tourism efforts to boost visibility and customer traffic for local businesses.
   See answer to number 9 above.