

**MINUTES
of the
FOURTH MEETING
of the
RURAL ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE**

**October 7-8, 2021
Chaparral High School
800 South County Line Drive, Auxiliary Gymnasium
Chaparral**

The fourth meeting of the Rural Economic Opportunities Task Force was called to order by Representative Willie D. Madrid, acting co-chair, on October 7, 2021 at 10:15 a.m. at Chaparral High School in Chaparral.

Present

Rep. Rachel A. Black
Sen. Craig W. Brandt* (10/7)
Sen. Crystal R. Diamond
Rep. Susan K. Herrera
Rep. Willie D. Madrid*
Rep. Roger E. Montoya
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto (10/8)
Rep. Nathan P. Small (10/7)

Absent

Sen. Siah Correa Hemphill, Co-Chair
Rep. Candie G. Sweetser, Co-Chair
Rep. Anthony Allison
Rep. Gail Armstrong
Rep. Kelly K. Fajardo
Sen. Carrie Hamblen
Sen. Leo Jaramillo
Sen. Michael Padilla
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez
Sen. Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics

Advisory Members

Rep. Ambrose Castellano (10/7)
Rep. Harry Garcia
Rep. Tara L. Lujan

Rep. Rebecca Dow
Sen. David M. Gallegos
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Patricia A. Lundstrom
Rep. Antonio Maestas
Rep. Brenda G. McKenna
Sen. Mimi Stewart

Guest Legislators

Sen. Ron Griggs (10/7)
Rep. Raymundo Lara (10/7)
Sen. Jeff Steinborn

(Attendance dates are noted for members not present for the entire meeting.)

*The speaker of the house of representatives and the president pro tempore of the senate appointed these legislators co-chairs for this meeting.

Staff

Mark Edwards, Bill Drafter, Legislative Council Service (LCS)

Sara Weidmaier, Research Assistant, LCS

Erin Bond, Research Assistant, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the task force meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and task force discussions for agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Thursday, October 7**Welcome and Introductions (10:15 a.m.)**

Representative Madrid welcomed the task force to Chaparral and asked task force members to introduce themselves.

Travis Dempsey, superintendent, Gadsden Independent School District, welcomed the task force to Chaparral High School and emphasized that rural students have different needs from urban students. He noted that the Gadsden Independent School District was able to use its cash balance to provide internet hotspots for students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Update on Rural Infrastructure Study (10:32 a.m.)

Terry Brunner, chief executive officer, Pivotal New Mexico, and Jenny Jackson, program manager, Pivotal New Mexico, provided an update on the Rural Infrastructure Study. The presentations can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=REOTF&Date=10/7/2021&ItemNumber=1>.

Issues Identified:

- a single cost analysis is not effective to cover New Mexico as a whole;
- the way electrical data is gathered creates gaps in the data; and
- small communities and associations lack the money, staff and knowledge to complete grant and loan applications.

Potential Solutions:

- the final report will include a range of options and analyses to meet New Mexico's diverse needs;
- the final report will include ways to streamline electrical data collection and make it more effective for policymakers; and
- communities can start planning now to prepare for federal funds by building relationships with other communities to leverage more funds and by allocating percentages of awards to management training and administration.

Stronger Economies Together (SET) Program Update (11:24 a.m.)

J. Michael Patrick, Ph.D., associate director, Doctorate of Economic Development Program, associate professor, Department of Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Business, and community resource and economic development specialist, Cooperative Extension Service, New Mexico State University, discussed the work of the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development SET Program. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/REOTF%20100721%20Item%202%20Building%20Rural%20Communities.pdf>.

Issues Identified:

- declining rural populations drive up the cost of services and infrastructure; and
- the officials who made the original plans may no longer be in office to implement the plans due to retirement or lost elections, and SET Program employees cannot enact plans without participating officials.

Potential Solutions:

- community colleges and communities could offer agricultural education programs to encourage youth to stay in the area; and
- SET Program employees and legislators can re-engage with local leaders to resume or redevelop previously established plans.

The Colonia of Chaparral (12:44 p.m.)

John B. Colquitt, president and real estate developer, Colquitt Company; Rebecca R. Lawrence, vice president, Sales and Community Development, Hueco Bolson Realty, Inc.; and Bobbie Rosencrans-Wright, president and operations director, Lake Section Water Company, discussed the history and hopes of Chaparral.

Issues identified:

- Chaparral's lack of incorporation can impact residential services and eligibility for state and federal funds.

Potential Solutions:

- local leaders can work with residents and the Chaparral Community Development Association to identify the needs and wants of the community; and
- the possibility of creating a new county to encompass Chaparral could be examined.

Improving Infrastructure in Rural Communities: Water, Wastewater, Electricity and Roads (2:03 p.m.)

Mr. Edwards discussed the co-chairs' plans for the upcoming legislative session in regard to the task force and summarized his work with Councils of Governments (COGs) around the state. Jay Armijo, executive director, South Central COG, discussed the work and needs of entities in the South Central COG. Priscilla Lucero, executive director, Southwest New Mexico COG, discussed the plans and needs of the Southwest New Mexico COG as well the collaborative work of New Mexico COGs. Hubert Quintana, consultant, Southeastern New Mexico Economic Development District, discussed the needs and work of the Southeastern New Mexico Economic Development District. The presentations can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=REOTF&Date=10/7/2021&ItemNumber=4>.

Issues Identified:

- COGs have limited staffing to meet the needs of diverse and sometimes isolated communities for assistance with governance issues and development of infrastructure planning;
- state and federal infrastructure grant opportunities for rural communities are expected to be much higher in 2022 than in recent years; and
- there is a concern that rural communities will not have the planning and project development and management capacities to capture many of the anticipated 2022 grant opportunities.

Potential Solutions:

- provide state funding for infrastructure planning, project development and management staff and engineering support at the COGs to assist rural communities through the four-year life cycle of federal and state grant programs;
- improve communication among COGs, legislators and rural communities;
- improve broadband coverage across the state to help communities and staff coordinate and apply for funding; and
- establish an oversight entity over the COGs to meet administrative needs and improve communication.

Public Comment (3:55 p.m.)

Reymundo Vasquez, member, CCDA, discussed the needs of Chaparral and noted that Chaparral often feels forgotten by Otero County and Dona Ana County. Mr. Vasquez noted the need for community input and dedicated studies when considering whether Chaparral should be incorporated or made into a unique county.

Uriel Rosales discussed problems Chaparral faces, including a lack of roads, streetlights and internet service. Mr. Rosales also discussed the impact of the Otero County Prison Facility on residents and detainees and noted that most of the employees of the facility live in El Paso, Texas.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 4:11 p.m.

Friday, October 8

Reconvene (10:13 a.m.)

Representative Madrid welcomed the task force members and recognized students from Chaparral High School.

South Central Solid Waste Authority's Benefit to Rural New Mexico (10:18 a.m.)

Patrick Peck, director, South Central Solid Waste Authority (SCSWA), discussed SCSWA's impact on communities in rural New Mexico and highlighted the authority's economic impact and community programs. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/REOTF%20100721%20Item%205%20--%20S.%20Central%20Solid%20Waste%20Authority%20--%20Benefits%20for%20Rural%20New%20Mexico.pdf>

Issues identified:

- the prevalence of illegal dumping around Chaparral;
- the high costs of recycling and greenhouse gas emission regulations; and
- microcontamination in the environment.

Potential Solutions:

- continue the partnership among agencies in Dona Ana County to clean and maintain known illegal dumping sites;
- develop in-state recycling and waste processing plants, including waste-to-energy plants; and
- fund state-level infrastructure to support waste management and green waste programs.

Practices of Restorative Justice (11:44 a.m.)

Dan Joslin, vice president, Corrections, Management and Training Corporation (MTC), and Mark Lee, vice president, Partnerships, MTC, discussed MTC's background and work. Dora Orozco, warden, Otero County Processing Center, MTC, discussed the center's work with United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainees. Hector Rios, warden, Otero County Prison Facility, MTC, discussed the correctional facility's missions and impact on the community. Nissi Jimenez, community relations manager, MTC, discussed the facility's social impact on the surrounding communities. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/REOTF%20100721%20Item%206%20--%20Otero%20County%20Prison%20and%20Processing%20Center.pdf>

Issues identified:

- the prevalence of COVID-19 cases in the Otero County Prison Facility throughout the pandemic; and
- communication barriers between correctional officers and inmates.

Potential Solutions:

- screen inmates for COVID-19 during processing, and quarantine infected inmates; and
- use over-the-phone interpreters or bilingual employees to communicate with inmates and detainees who do not speak English.

Tour of Otero County Prison Facility: MTC

The task force toured the Otero County Prison Facility.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the task force, the meeting adjourned at 12:35 p.m.