

Coal Avenue Commons cuts the ribbon

Written by By: Molly Howell Sun Correspondent
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Celebrates downtown Gallup

Coal Avenue Commons held the ribbon-cutting for its first phase Aug. 24.

It is part of the GallupARTS partnership with the City of Gallup to re-imagine Coal Avenue as a signature “event street” and creative commercial hub.

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Thanks to the National Endowment for the Arts “Our Town” grant in 2018, which was matched by \$150,000 from local government, the process is underway.

Mayor Louis Bonaguidi took note of the changes.

“Coming out of the theater last Thursday night (Aug. 19) when it was dark and seeing the street lit up, I can’t help but think we did the right thing. This is great,” Bonaguidi said. “I think everybody in this community is going to be proud of what we’ve done here.”

At the ceremony, he reflected on growing up in downtown Gallup and seeing the many changes the street has undergone. He mentioned that in 1975, the City Council thought the street was too narrow, so they widened it by taking three feet off each sidewalk.

Bonaguidi laughed at the fact that the city is choosing to narrow the street now. He said he thought making these changes was the right decision.

Bonaguidi was joined by members of the city council who agreed that the project was a huge improvement for the city’s infrastructure.

Dist. 1 Councilor Linda Garcia talked about how the revitalization would impact the city.

“The city took this project on as a way to improve the infrastructure to make downtown streets safer for the pedestrians,” Garcia said. “So I’m saying today and every day from now on, let’s enjoy the beauty and the revitalization of Downtown [in the] City of Gallup.”

Dist. 4 Councilor Fran Palochak was pleased to discover how the changes made it more convenient for Gallupians to move about and take advantage of the city’s downtown district.

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“I have a friend who is wheelchair-bound, and we were so impressed the other day when we came to shop downtown and we were able to get her wheelchair up to the building without having to go up a curb,” Palochak said.

Phase One of the project included Second Street and Third Streets, along with the intersection and the walkway through the two streets.

Phase Two, which will begin shortly, will include the intersection from Second Street to First Street. The project as a whole contains two blocks of downtown and the walkway.

In a previous interview with the *Sun*, Gallup’s Tourism and Marketing Manager Jennifer Lazarz stated that the project includes widening the sidewalks, making sure they’re even, and updating the utilities.

Phase One cost almost \$4.9 million, according to Lazarz. She said the city staff is currently lobbying for Phase Two. She estimated that the total bill will add up to about \$8.3 million.

A grand opening of Coal Avenue Commons Phase One will be held for the public in conjunction with the October Artscrawl event. That celebration will feature live music, arts, and other entertainment that showcases the new block.

Beth Blakeman contributed to this story.

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