

Lodgers' Tax Committee does a SWOT analysis for City of Gallup

Written by By Molly Ann Howell
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Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats —those were the subjects the Lodgers' Tax Committee focused on Jan. 6 as they met with Gallup Tourism and Marketing Manager Jennifer Lazarz to develop ideas to bring tourists to the city.

Committee member Jason Arsenault brought up the city's location as one of its strong points. He mentioned its proximity to I-40 and its distance from major cities like Albuquerque and Flagstaff, Ariz.

"[When] I'm somewhere and, say 'I'm from Gallup, N. M.,' even if they've not spent time here, the majority of the people always kind of know where that is," Arsenault said. "So I think that's an amazing, amazing positive for our community."

Arsenault also pointed out that Gallup has a lot of cultural offerings. He specifically mentioned the nightly Indian dances that occur in the summer.

"How amazing is it that [you can] pull off the freeway and be in Gallup, N. M. and see these dances," Arsenault said. "I think when somebody sees something like that, it's an automatic positive experience, because it's like nothing they've ever seen."

GALLUP'S WEAKNESSES

After discussing the city's many strengths, the committee turned to its weaknesses.

Lazarz opened with the city's generational growth problem.

"[We] need a generational step up," Lazarz said. "There are multiple events in this community that in the next five to 10 years are in danger of petering out, because there are no youth or younger generations involved in sustaining the event."

Lazarz gave the Red Rock Balloon Rally and the 72nd Lion's Club Rodeo as examples. She said she would like to see more young people get involved around Gallup, but she would also like to see more event organizers step up.

The committee addressed the city's lack of housing and lack of jobs as reasons why younger people may not be choosing to make Gallup their home. In addition, they noted that many professionals, such as doctors, are retiring.

"I don't see a whole bunch of young people coming here to fill those positions," Arsenault pointed out.

Committee member Jeremy Boucher agreed.

"I think a lot of the young people who are here who are professionals, a lot of them are in and out," Boucher said. "Gallup—it can be a tough place; it can grind you down and burn you out."

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The committee members acknowledged that the community's attitude toward outsiders doesn't help. Boucher suggested that the town's general mindset leans toward the attitude that young people want to change the town.

Anna Connell, another committee member, said that one of Gallup's weaknesses is that "we're like 20 years behind the time[s]."

Another problem that many different organizations around Gallup are working on is infrastructure. Boucher recognized that the city has the available infrastructure, but that people just haven't kept up with it.

"[It's] not on purpose in a lot of cases, but because of our economic realities and stuff, we have all these great resources, and then over the years just weren't able to keep them up," Boucher said. "Everyone's sort of just okay with that on some level."

GALLUP'S OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

After discussing the city's weaknesses, the committee talked about ways to turn those weaknesses into opportunities. One of those was the possibility of locating more businesses downtown.

"Anywhere you go outside of Gallup N. M., that's where you spend your time [is downtown]," Arsenault stated. "You don't spend your time walking around Walmart, ... your downtown is the heart of a community, and we need to figure out as a community how to grow it."

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The natural beauty of Gallup was a point of discussion in the strength column of the SWOT analysis, but Lazarz also made a point of acknowledging why it can be seen as a threat. She reminded the committee that more communities have been promoting outdoor activities ever since the pandemic.

What may have once made Gallup unique, has turned into something everyone has or thinks they have. Lazarz gave an example of a picture of some pretty rocks and said many communities are now using those types of images as promotional pieces. According to Lazarz, this fact makes what Gallup has appear to be less unique.

"What's really sucky is we have the rare diamonds, yet it's so hard to convince people our diamonds are rare," Lazarz said.

Alcoholism can also pose a threat to Gallup's tourism. For years now, McKinley County has been dealing with an alcoholism problem, leading to the ban of alcohol sales on Sundays. The committee acknowledged that the county's known problem could deter tourists.

Boucher argued that some tourists may think Gallup doesn't care about its citizens who suffer from alcoholism.

"I think another thing is why would you want to go spend time in a community that seems like it doesn't care about those people?" Boucher said.

The Jan. 6 meeting was the first time the Lodger's Tax Committee had done a SWOT analysis. Lazarz said they would revisit it in six months.