

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

# County of Luna

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Chairman, District 1

**Linda Smrkovsky**  
Commissioner, District 2



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Commissioner, District 3

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## Media Release

Luna County’s new Community and Economic Development Committee left its first meeting with one overarching goal — create one job.

The goal is to create as many jobs as possible, but committee members felt working to create at least one job would be a tangible sign that the new effort is in the right direction. The advisory committee was formed by the Luna County Board of Commissioners in late 2014 to promote sustainable economic development and improve the local quality of life. It held its first meeting on Wednesday, April 8. Lori Coleman, owner of Spanish Stirrup Rock Shop, was elected chair of the committee.

“This working committee — and yes, they will be working — is a collaborative effort between various government agencies, individuals, and businesses,” Charles “Tink” Jackson, Luna County manager, said. “Our goal is to reinvigorate economic development locally, with an emphasis on agriculture, supporting existing businesses, manufacturing and infrastructure.”

The committee began with a review of Luna County’s six-point economic development plan: Support and strengthen the county’s agricultural economy; infrastructure and facilities; business startups, support, and retention; workforce development; community planning and community leadership; and promotion and marketing.

“I applaud the efforts of these citizens to volunteer their time and local knowledge to help us improve Luna County,” Luna County Commission Chairman Joe “Oleo” Milo, Jr., said. “This committee represents a cross section of the entire community and the best interests of the county. I look forward to hearing the ideas they report back to the commission.”

For several years, the county’s economic development efforts have included strategies to support local businesses that choose to utilize the services, such as developing marketing plans or business counseling. The committee wants to see the county expand the breadth and impact of economic and community development through an inclusive process that will support existing projects and businesses while finding resources to meet those needs.

“If we bring something in, will it compete with something that is already here,” Jackson asked the group.

That question sparked a lively discussion amongst committee members on past efforts, and where future attention should be focused. Village of Columbus Mayor and committee member Philip Skinner argued that in the near future, the committee should focus on training and

educating themselves on what economic development actually entails, saying that locally, there is “no uniformity in economic development knowledge.”

The conversation quickly moved into how the county could help create a job locally, with the major theme in support of building upon existing business opportunities. Value-added agricultural products were discussed, as well as means to support the collection of two of the county’s more abundant resources, wind and solar energy.

“Some of these ideas have been discussed before, but we’re working to connect discussion with results,” Jessica Etcheverry, director of Economic Development and Special Projects for Luna County, explained. “We already have several irons in the fire to bridge between theory, ideas or planning and getting work accomplished or jobs created.”

Etcheverry, who is facilitating the committee as director of Luna County Economic Development, has worked to help lay the foundation for a variety of federal funding opportunities, as well as actual projects, such as the planned expansion of the Columbus Port of Entry. Her work has included securing parcels of land on which the new port will be built.

Committee members include Coleman, Zach Penn, Kevin Zachek, Mary Galbraith, Lyn Orona, Mayor Skinner, and Cassie Arias.

The committee plans to meet on a monthly basis. For more information, contact (575) 546-0494.

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