

From Scarcity to Abundance: Our Theory of Change

Albuquerque has always been a city at the crossroads.

Long before Route 66, the railroad or the interstate, geography made this a place where people, cultures, and economies converged. Indigenous communities built civilizations along the Rio Grande. El Camino Real connected us south to Mexico. The Santa Fe Trail brought another wave of commerce. When the railroad arrived, it connected Albuquerque to a rapidly expanding national economy. Route 66, the interstates, and the Sunport followed. Being a city at the crossroads has always brought opportunity. But it has also brought disruption.

Our history includes colonization, war, trauma, dispossession, and attempts to erase language and culture. Land was taken. Children were separated from families. New governments, economies, and power structures arrived, one after another. Yet somehow, we held on.

Our traditions remain embedded in our food, architecture, art, families, and institutions. Land grants, tribal governments, and acequias remain part of modern New Mexico. We didn't simply survive these transitions. We found a way to modernize without surrendering the cultures and identity that make this place unlike anywhere else in America. That history gave us our superpower: resilience.

But our resilience has another side. For generations, New Mexicans had good reason to think in terms of scarcity. Water was scarce. Money was scarce. Jobs and opportunities were scarce. When there isn't enough to go around, you protect what you have. You save for the next downturn. You minimize risk. You hold on to your land. You make sure you get your piece of the pie because you don't know whether another piece is coming.

Those instincts helped us survive. But over generations, survival became a mindset. Now a scarcity mindset is embedded in many of our most important public policies and approaches to problem solving. We add layers of bureaucracy but rarely remove them. We divide public dollars equally among geographic districts, so everyone gets something rather than asking where it's needed most — or what is its highest use. We save instead of investing our cash reserves, using only a fraction in our own state. When another neighborhood gets something, we ask, "What about us?" When someone proposes housing, a stadium or another ambitious project, we often start by looking for the reason it won't work.

City government does it too. We hold on to vacant land and empty buildings because someday we might need them. We build permitting systems around eliminating every possible risk. We make residents wait for permission to renovate their homes, start businesses, and use facilities their own tax dollars paid for. For a long time that caution made sense. But here's the problem: New Mexico isn't actually poor anymore.

New Mexico has accumulated extraordinary public wealth. The state now oversees more than \$70 billion in its "rainy day" fund, and more than \$3 billion in cash reserves each year that could be invested in our communities. Yet we still talk as though there isn't enough: enough housing, addiction treatment, capital for businesses, educational opportunity or infrastructure.

We have become, in some ways, the richest poor state in America. For most of our history, the question was *how do we protect what little we have?* Today it should become, *what are we going to do with what we have?*

Of course we should save for future generations. But children sitting in classrooms today *are* our future generations. So are the entrepreneurs starting businesses, families looking for homes, and people who need addiction treatment today. Investing in them isn't taking from our future. It is investing in it.

There are signs this shift is beginning. New Mexico has made bold commitments to no-cost universal childcare and a new medical school. APS is working to connect students with internships and career pathways into the industries that will shape our economy. These investments begin with a different question. Not *why can't we?* But *what becomes possible if we do?*

That is abundance- that is the basis for our public policy going forward. But understanding how we got here only matters if we know how to move forward.

First, we have to feel safe. Not just statistically safer, but comfortable walking through a park, riding a bus, opening a business, or raising a family, and safer for people living on the street. We cannot move from survival to growth and abundance when we are scared.

Public safety is a precursor to any form of abundance. That means confronting addiction and homelessness by continuing to build pathways from the street to shelter, treatment and housing while ensuring our public spaces work for everyone. Compassion and accountability are not opposites.

Second, we have to rethink how government works for people. Many systems our employees work within were built over decades to minimize risk. Layer enough rules together, and simple things become difficult. A permit takes too long. A public facility or vacant city-owned land sits unused while the community needs space. Residents and businesses spend hours navigating processes that should take minutes.

That frustrates the public and the thousands of City employees who come to work wanting to help people get things done. Our job is to give them better tools, clearer processes, and more freedom to solve problems.

Government should make everyday life easier, not harder.

That is why I am dedicating the next three years to the City's abundance agenda: restoring the broadest sense of public safety, giving people more choices, putting what government already has to work for you, and making it easier to get things done. This is our answer to the scarcity mindset and my commitment to make City government a force for good in people's daily lives.

It starts with giving people more choices. We need more freedom to decide what "home" looks like and more housing of every kind. We are working to remove barriers to building and putting nearly 200 City-held lots to work for housing, small businesses, and community uses.

It also means making what we already have available to more people. A family shouldn't have to spend thousands of dollars to find a place for a birthday party or quinceañera when public spaces they helped pay for are available. We are opening more of those spaces because public assets should work for the public.

The same principle applies to childcare. The state made a historic commitment to universal no-cost childcare. Albuquerque can help make that promise real by opening underused City spaces to providers so they can expand and serve more families.

Cost of living is not only rent, groceries, and utilities. It is also time lost waiting for permits, filling out forms, and navigating unnecessary steps. Entrepreneurs and homeowners shouldn't need an expert to navigate City Hall. We want regulatory justice: simpler rules, preapproved plans, faster inspections, and a default that moves from "wait" and "no" toward "yes."

Affordability isn't only about lowering costs; it is also about helping families earn more. As quantum, fusion, film and other industries grow, we should use tools like community benefits agreements, local hiring, and local sourcing to make sure economic growth reaches Albuquerque families.

But making government work for people also means defending Albuquerque when forces beyond our control threaten our community. Whether challenging federal immigration actions that undermine trust or demanding answers about DEA practices that allowed fentanyl to flood our streets, I will defend Albuquerque.

At a time when people across America are losing faith that institutions can actually make their lives better, Albuquerque has a chance to prove something different: government can still work for you.

That's our work these next three years- we will restore the broadest sense of public safety, give people more choices, put our resources to work for you, remove barriers, and defend our city. That is our answer to scarcity and how we build a more abundant Albuquerque, where government reduces the friction of daily life and earns back trust.