

## [Reader View: El Rio project would create places to call home](#)

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As “Emily” goes off to college or to serve her country, there is a good chance she’ll miss Santa Fe and want to return. But to entice her and thousands like her to come back, she’ll want answers to questions haunting her. What kind of job can I get? Where am I going to live? And where will I meet my soul mate?

Where will Emily find meaningful work can be answered threefold. First, we baby boomers finishing up our careers with the state or city are retiring in droves. Ideally, the jobs will be filled by Santa Feans well-qualified to step in. And baby boomers increasingly need skilled healing and health practitioners. Finally, Santa Fe’s creative economy is alive and thriving, rewarding entrepreneurial-minded 20-somethings willing to take a risk on a path not yet taken.

Where Emily will meet her soul mate goes hand in hand with where she will live. As recently laid out by a new study conducted for Goldman Sachs (no slacks when it comes to investing in new economic winners), those answers go hand in hand for millennials who eschew buying homes at the fringe and cars to get there, in favor of renting apartments designed to maximize spontaneous encounters and sharing cars, bikes and bus seats.

Santa Fe has a huge unmet demand for the kind of housing millennials seek: small apartment units. Raw land suitable for such uses are at the fringe, but that’s the last place they want to live. Where are the places of the heart where Emily could not only live but meet that soul mate she can devote her life to in Santa Fe?

The proposed El Rio project along the Santa Fe River can meet that need, creating a place that anchors the creative space now being carved out between Agua Fría and Meow Wolf’s new space near Cerrillos Road. The developer, Tierra Concepts, is the prize-winning local builder of the commercial development on Pacheco Street that features Sweetwater Harvest Kitchen. El Rio would meet the aspirations of hundreds of our next generation of Santa Feans. I live a 90-second bike ride downriver from the El Rio location (once Santa Fe County extends the river trail later this year) at the Commons on the Alameda community where Tierra Concepts’ Eric Faust built our Common House. Eric lived at the Commons for many years before Tierra Concepts outgrew his home office; he fully knows what it takes to design, build and operate a place that not only means a living space but one that creates community. And if there is anything Santa Fe is short on, it’s places that create community.

City staff analyzing El Rio expect minimal Agua Fría Street traffic impact, and many residents would either work at home or in the emerging artist community on both sides of Siler Road. Not one dime of public support is requested by the developer, a change from the normal development paradigm in Santa Fe for those in urgent need of housing. Instead, what is asked is the simple but brave request to meet our next generation’s aspirations: a place to call home. Emily’s request is not too much to ask.

Fast-forward 10 years: After the city fathers and mothers approve El Rio and apartments are made into hundreds of homes, Emily comes home along the bike trail one day to take a class in energy storage at the Ecovercity building centering El Rio. There, not only does she devise a way to capture computer waste heat into phase change salt canisters and unleash the next great Santa Fe economic hit, she gets to know fellow El Rio resident Chris. From such seeming serendipity, they fall in love, adopt a neglected child and stay at El Rio to raise him and their energy business among other such connected Santa Feans.

*Ken Hughes is vice president of the Commons on the Alameda and former chairman of the Santa Fe Planning Commission.*