

County launches PR blitz to spread word of land use code

By J.R. Logan

The Taos News, 12/08/2011

The Taos County Planning Department has scheduled a flurry of public meetings over the next two months — from Costilla to Pilar — to notify residents of a proposed overhaul to the land use regulations.

At least 12 meetings have been scheduled between Dec. 15 and Jan. 18 in several communities. The campaign is leading up to five days of hearings before the Taos County Commission at the end of January, which could vote to adopt the new regulations.

A general hearing has been scheduled Jan. 25, 26, 27, 30 and 31 at the Taos County Commission Chambers. The first day has been set aside to discuss general articles of the code. The four additional days are to consider zoning overlay plans submitted by individual neighborhood associations.

The county unveiled its most recent “final draft” of the new regulations in mid-November.

The bulk of the regulations deals with planning administration and is meant to clean up and streamline the process of having development approved.

The code also includes “zone overlays” for 11 neighborhoods. The overlays were created by approved neighborhood associations to delineate minimum lot size, allowable development, and other zoning concerns. The code allows additional neighborhoods to come forward with their own overlays in the future. The code stipulates that existing uses that do not fit the new regulations will be “grand fathered” in if the new code is approved. The Taos County Land Use Regulations apply to all areas of Taos County, excluding the town of Taos, Taos Pueblo, Red River and Questa, or state or federal government lands.

This summer, the county released another version of the new regulations only to have the commission send the document back for revisions. That iteration of the code sparked controversy surrounding an “irrigated agricultural zone.”

That zone has been left out of the most recent draft.

However, when the previous draft was made public, many residents argued they had been left out of the planning process, prompting commissioners to ask for greater outreach.

This week, the county sent 22,000 letters (in English and Spanish) to registered property owners, explaining the basic premise of the code, advising them where they could find a copy and listing the meetings.

The county has also created official comment forms, which are available at the Taos County Planning Department or online at www.taoscounty.org.

For information, contact the planning department at (575) 737-6304.

A copy of the new regulations can be found at the planning department, public library and community centers. A copy is also available for download at www.taosnews.com.

The county, with the help of numerous volunteers, have spent nearly a decade developing the new regulations.

None of the sitting commissioners have yet to publicly stated whether they intend to vote to adopt the new code. Most have said they want to wait to hear what the public has to say.