



Town of Taos agrees to joins regional LANL coalition

By Matthew van Buren

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The Taos Town Council voted unanimously April 24 to join the Regional Coalition of LANL Communities, giving the town representation on a board that works to address environmental and economic issues related to the Los Alamos National Laboratories (LANL).

Established last year, the coalition also includes Los Alamos, Santa Fe, Rio Arriba and Taos counties, as well as the cities of Santa Fe and Espanola. Commissioner Andrew Chávez represents Taos County on the board of directors, and Councilor Andrew Gonzales said he would be interested in representing the town of Taos.

According to a joint powers agreement establishing the coalition among the respective entities, LANL is “one of the largest employers in Northern New Mexico and a critical economic driver in the region,” each party’s local economy and environment is affected by LANL’s activities, and the parties “share a common interest in assuring that LANL missions remain sustainable and diversified, while assuring protection of the environment.”

The coalition’s four-prong purpose, according to the joint powers agreement, includes:

- Promotion of economic development, which includes advocating for stable, longterm funding of LANL missions, promotion of “new and diverse scientific endeavors at LANL, focusing on employment and educational opportunities” in the region, and support of workplace training and business incubation.
- Promotion and coordination of environmental initiatives, such as the performance of cleanup activities and prevention of future contamination.
- Participation in regional planning, which includes developing long-term relationships among various entities.
- Evaluating policy initiatives and legislation for impacts on the coalition, including participation in outreach initiatives and involvement in the state and legislative process, as well as administrative proceedings.

According to a fact sheet compiled by the coalition and presented to the town, LANL is Northern New Mexico’s largest employer, employing 13,587 people and paying close to \$1.3 billion in wages. In Taos County, according to the document, 153 people employed by LANL earn \$13.3 million.

So far this year, the coalition has advocated for more funding for LANL as well as for lab-related cleanup efforts. It is also seeking to involve tribal entities in Northern New Mexico.

“The Regional Coalition continues to actively seek tribal governments’ participation in Coalition activities,” the fact sheet states. “While none have yet become official members, governors and other tribal representatives attend meetings, including meetings in Washington, D.C. Further, the (JPA) is structured to allow the pueblos to join the Regional Coalition on a timeline that works best for tribal councils.”

Los Alamos County Commission Chairman and coalition board member Sharon Stover addressed the Taos Town Council April 24, saying the coalition has the support of the New Mexico Congressional Delegation and has successfully helped to advocate for increased funding for cleanup.

“We’re looking for stable cleanup dollars,” she said. “I think it’s important for us as a region to speak with one voice.”

Each member of the coalition is represented by one of its elected officials, who each have one vote on the board. Stover said the group meets monthly, and Taos County will host the next meeting May 10. Meetings of the coalition are open to the public and are otherwise held in accordance with the state Open Meetings Act, according to the JPA.