

Taos County to hear land use code changes

By J.R. Logan

The Taos News, 7/12/2012

Taos County will consider changes to its existing land use code that would allow neighborhood associations to bring zoning plans to the county commission for adoption.

The commission voted to “drop” a complete overhaul of the code in January after a mob showed up to voice opposition to the new regulations. The relatively minor changes to the current code are meant to avoid that kind of controversy.

But there are also concerns that the small fixes are ignoring larger problems in the existing land use code.

“This is do-able, but from a legal standpoint, it’s a Band-Aid,” county attorney and interim county manager Barbara Mart’nez told the commission at its meeting Tuesday (July 10). “It’s been hard for me to give up the idea that we could do the comprehensive changes that were proposed last winter.”

Mart’nez noted that the existing code puts businesses through a harrowing permit process — a process that can take more than a year to be decided and can cost tens of thousands of dollars. The overhaul of the code was intended to make that a less difficult process while protecting agricultural land and other sensitive areas of the county from development.

Attorney and former county manager Adam Baker was recently hired by the Upper Las Colonias Neighborhood Association to retool the existing code so that neighborhood zoning plans — known as “overlays” — could be adopted by the county. Baker presented those changes at a commission meeting last month.

Baker told the commission Tuesday that the scope of his suggested changes was limited to the purpose of allowing Upper Las Colonias to adopt new zoning.

“All we’re asking, all we intended to do, was to have an opportunity to fix some things that aren’t working in Upper Las Colonias,” Baker said.

But Joe Torres, an Arroyo Seco resident who was part of a contingent to stop the adoption of the code in January, told the commission that the county should “slow down and listen” before moving forward with any changes. He was concerned that the county has no guidelines to determine if a neighborhood association truly represents its community.

Commission chairman Joe Mike Durán agreed with Torres.

“The county right now don’t even know what they want in this land use regs, and now we want to piecemeal it,” Durán said. “I think it needs some time.”

But Commissioner Dan Barrone argued that the process of rewriting the existing code has dragged on long enough.

“We’re no further now than we were six years ago,” Barrone said. “I think we need to start somewhere.”

Barrone, Andrew Chávez and Nicklos Jaramillo voted to publish notice of the proposed changes. No final document showing exactly what is being proposed was ready Tuesday.

The county commission will vote on whether to amend the code at a public hearing Aug. 14.