

Town Council urges more public comment on Taos land-use plan

By Matthew van Buren

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The Taos Town Council is urging further outreach efforts before it votes on a proposed revision to the town's land-use plan.

A Nov. 27 Town Council discussion focused on the revised land-use element of the town's Vision 2020 master plan, originally adopted in 1999.

The proposed revision sets goals, objectives and policies with future development in mind. It takes issue with sprawl and encourages denser development, resource preservation, alternative modes of transportation and the creation of walkable neighborhoods that have "a little bit of everything," as long-range planner Matthew Foster has said.

Foster presented the draft to the council Nov. 27, saying the revision looks to protect the "character" of Taos and that he has engaged in "extensive" public outreach regarding the land-use element over the past couple of years.

According to the draft, groups including the Taos Housing Corporation, the Taos County Chamber of Commerce, Taos Friends United, the Taos County Association of Realtors, Taos Pueblo and a variety of other governmental entities provided input.

"Largely, the feedback has been quite positive," Foster said.

Members of the council did not take issue with the contents of the plan, but they expressed concern that members of the public had not had sufficient opportunity to review and comment on it.

Councilor Fred Peralta asked if community members — "not agencies, not departments" — had many chances to review and comment on the plan. He said he hopes for a plan developed at the grassroots level instead of the town pursuing a "push-down" approach.

Foster said the public has had "numerous" chances to comment, as he had organized a number of public meetings and conducted outreach on the Internet, in *The Taos News* and on the radio.

"I would like to see way more public input," Councilor Andrew Gonzales said.

Gonzales suggested holding more community "round table" discussions in order to get more individual input. Councilor Rudy Abeyta agreed, describing getting comments from "everyday" citizens, rather than just community groups, as a "key component" of the process.

Mayor Darren Córdova said getting people to participate in planning in a proactive way can be a challenge; he said without a major, pressing change in land use, the town can expect “marginal” attendance at best.

In an interview with *The Taos News* , Foster said he plans to hold more public meetings over the coming months. He said he is developing a schedule and intends to present it to the council in another month. Foster said he welcomes any opportunity to make the plan bigger, broader and more inclusive.

“I think it’s just fine,” he said. “I’m not worried about any delays.”

Other elements of the Vision 2020 plan to be revised include infrastructure, natural resources, parks and recreation, community services, historic preservation and economic development.

“I’ll be doing that in the next year,” Foster told the council regarding the completion of the economic development element.

The land-use element can be viewed in its entirety at www.taosgov.com/planning/vision.php .

Comments can be submitted to Foster by email at MFoster@taosgov.com.