

## Town officials seek comment on sign code

By Matthew van Buren

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The town of Taos is soliciting public comment on proposed changes to its sign code.

The town decided to revisit the two-year-old ordinance after losses in municipal court in September.

The cases involved alleged violations of the code by Jeff Northrup, a Taos resident known for his protest signs, but were dropped based on a “lack of specificity in charging documents.”

The draft attempts to simplify the code and also lays out requirements for signs located in the right-of-way of Paseo del Pueblo Sur and Paseo del Pueblo Norte. At a Dec. 11 meeting of the Town Council, town manager Oscar Rodriguez said changes are based on safety considerations and aim to reduce the amount of discretion the former code gave to the code administrator.

“We’ve had a bad experience,” he told the council.

Planning director Bill Morris told the council the old code is “very verbose” and longer than necessary.

The changes that Morris highlighted Dec. 11 include limiting the number of portable signs allowed per business to one, allowing neon lighting under specific circumstances, adding criteria for A-frame signs in the Central Business District, reducing the number of types of non-permanent signs in the code and adding a section to deal with election signs.

Regarding protest signs like Northrup’s, the draft code proposes “safety zones” along Paseo del Pueblo Sur and Paseo del Pueblo Norte. Areas exempt from the “safety zones” include stretches south of Bertha Street and Paseo del Ca-on.

“The intent is to provide areas along these rights-of-way for the safe placement of temporary signage in a manner that ensures and addresses public safety concerns,” the draft reads.

Signs located in rights-of-way but outside of safety zones must also comply with the following criteria: They shall be located off of any pavement or sidewalk, no closer than 100 feet from any other temporary signage, and remain in place no longer than six hours. Such signs must also be “restrained to resist wind but shall not be secured using large rocks or concrete blocks or any other heavy materials.”

Following Morris' presentation to the council, Mayor Darren Córdova, a frequent target of Northrup's, said he finds some of the provisions in the draft to still be "subjective in a sense." He said the code would be made "cleaner" if unattended signs were kept off public rights-of-way altogether.

The council moved to continue the item until its Feb. 12 meeting.

Those interested in reading the sign code can find it at *taosnews.com* and make suggestions in the website's "comments" section.