

Taos County talks litigation in annexation dispute

By J.R. Logan

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The Taos County Commission has unanimously voted to "take all legal action necessary" if the town of Taos chooses to move forward with a proposed annexation of the Taos Regional Airport.

The commission took the vote at a meeting Monday (March 11) after sparring with town officials over negotiations meant to resolve the annexation and airport issue.

The town of Taos stands to receive a \$24 million federal grant for the construction of a cross-wind runway at the town-operated airport. To get the grant, the town must come up with a \$1.2 million match.

The town announced late last year that it planned to annex six miles of highway right of way — from the northernmost town limit, through El Prado to the Old Blinking Light intersection, then west to the airport property — in order to capture tax revenue from the project in order to come up with the match.

Taos County has expressed concerns about the annexation and submitted a written offer to the town last month. In the offer, the county said it would pay half of the match amount as well as half the operations costs at the airport in exchange for the town abandoning the annexation plan.

County commissioner Tom Blankenhorn suggested Monday that the county could co-sign with the town on a loan for the match.

Town manager Oscar Rodríguez expressed doubts about the proposal, arguing that the town could not be assured that the county would provide the funding for the full term of the loan.

As owner of the airport, the town plans to petition itself for annexation.

County attorney Barbara Martínez said Monday that she had doubts about the validity of the town's proposed annexation, though town officials countered that they felt the annexation was legitimate.

When asked about the possibility of litigation, Taos mayor Darren Córdova said in an interview Monday that the county had no legal standing to take the issue to court because it did not own any land included in the proposed annexation.

Later at the same meeting, the town and county agreed to look into merging their planning departments. Deputy county manager Rick Bellis said it would be a good sign that the two governments could find consensus on some issues.

For more on this story, see the March 14 edition of *The Taos News*.