

## **Taos County to revisit contentious land use code**

**By J.R. Logan**

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The overhaul of Taos County's land use regulations that drew fervent opposition last year could be adopted as soon as July.

In January 2012, the previous commission voted to "drop" the issue when faced with a roomful of opponents who said they were left out of the process. But a majority of the current commission supports the sweeping changes, meaning new regulations will likely be adopted in the coming months.

Revisions to the county's existing land use ordinance — which is widely considered to be outdated and overly burdensome — has been in the works for several years.

While supporters and citizen volunteers who've helped draft the new regulations say they strike a balance between protecting open space and agricultural land while promoting business development, many citizens are wary of changing rules over how land can be used.

County attorney Barbara Martinez told the commission Tuesday (April 2) that county staff plan to review and make minor changes to the proposed code starting in mid-April. Once the review is complete, Martinez said the county could hold a series of public meetings to discuss the changes before bringing the new code to the commissioners for approval as soon as July.

Commissioner Tom Blankenhorn has brought 15 pages of proposed changes to the county. Those changes are the result of a long series of meetings between Blankenhorn and property owners north of town. Residents from that area came out in full force against the proposed code in early 2012.

Blankenhorn and Gabriel Romero were both elected to the five-member county commission last year, and both ran on a pro-land use reform platform. Commissioner Dan Barrone has also expressed strong support for the new code.

Commissioners Larry Sánchez and Joe Mike Dòran voted against the regulations last January.

The updated regulations include a streamlining of the administrative process for reviewing development. They also include a mechanism by which neighborhood associations can create their own zoning rules to be adopted by the commission. The commission said Tuesday that it planned to adopt the generic regulations first, then allow neighborhoods to come forward to have zoning approved.

Several neighborhood associations expressed dissatisfaction after the code failed to pass last year. An effort by one neighborhood to have its zoning adopted last summer was also met by opponents from various parts of the county.