



Town of Taos makes offer to potential planning director

By Matthew van Buren

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Several months after the departure of long-range planner Matthew Foster, the town of Taos is poised to hire a new planning director.

Human Resources Director Loretta Trujillo said a pre-employment offer was made to Martha Perkins, pending a background check. The town was offering a salary between \$58,000-62,000.

Mayor Darren Córdova said the council is interested in “getting a solid and qualified team on board” in the planning department and getting the department in order. Councilors have questioned the organization of the department in recent months, with Councilor Rudy Abeyta describing it as “broken” and in need of a “major overhaul” at an October meeting.

Córdova said the new director will also be responsible for moving affordable housing projects forward while also focusing on infrastructure, the comprehensive plan and economic development initiatives.

“I was impressed with her in-depth knowledge,” he said of Perkins.

According to information she submitted to the town, Perkins worked most recently for the state Public Regulation Commission’s (PRC) Utility Division, where she reviewed and analyzed “electric, gas, water and wastewater utility cases pursuant to local, state and federal law.” She also wrote that she actively participated in the development of new rules, including working with stakeholders and presenting proposals to the PRC for approval.

Perkins also worked for Los Alamos County from 1986-2012, according to her résumé. From 1992-2012, she worked for the Community Development Department, where she wrote she “worked closely with private businesses, the Los Alamos Commerce and Development Corporation, the State of New Mexico, county departments and the public to encourage economic development, tourism, affordable housing and downtown redevelopment in Los Alamos.” She also wrote, solicited and administered requests for proposals, contracts and grants.

Perkins holds a bachelor’s degree in economics from the University of California-Santa Cruz and a master’s degree in organizational management from the University of Phoenix.

“I have extensive knowledge and experience in the principles and practices of urban planning, business licenses, code enforcement, economic development, affordable housing and building,” Perkins wrote.

She wrote she applied for and received Community Development Block Grant funding,

MainStreet funding and federal transportation funds. She also drafted changes to comprehensive plans and development codes, as well as working on parking agreements and zoning revisions.

“I know how to solicit input and obtain public participation on public infrastructure, master planning, visitor promotion, economic development and changes to local ordinances,” she wrote, going on to say, “Finally, I have budgeting accounting, project management and statistical experience. I used to manage the lodger’s tax advisory fund; several department budgets; the collection of building permit, planning application and business license fees; and the county’s permitting system. I wrote requests for information, bids, proposals, set up committees to rank submittals, wrote contracts and approved invoices and payments.”

In a phone interview with *The Taos News*, Perkins said she anticipates an Aug. 5 start date. She said she has been discouraged to see New Mexico communities struggling with economic decline, and she saw the position here as a way to help. She said in Los Alamos, she applied for grants and advanced projects having to do with landscaping, streetscapes, linking parts of downtown and building green spaces visitors enjoyed and in which residents could take pride. She said giving downtown areas a “nicer feel” is a good way to promote economic development, and once a plan is in place, a single project can act as a catalyst for more.

Perkins said she will work with town manager Oscar Rodr'guez to address departmental needs with a community- service focus. She said in Los Alamos, her department implemented a county-wide permitting software system. “I think we can do the same thing for Taos,” she said.

Perkins said she is excited to come to Taos and expects the job to be rewarding. “I know it’s going to be hard work,” she said. “Taos has a great reputation. We just need to maintain that and build on it.”

Other applicants the town interviewed include:

- Russell Naranjo, director of planning and land use for Espanola;
- Numair Latif, who has worked as a consultant and teacher and has spent the last 15 years focusing on sustainable land use; planning, natural resource management and information technology;
- Nick Eckert, an administrator for Mesilla, N.M.;
- Patrick Nicholson, who has worked as a planning consultant, senior planner for Santa Fe and planning director for the Ohkay Owingeh tribal administration.