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El Prado residents seek law change to fight town's annexation

By Elizabeth Cleary

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In order to block the town of Taos' annexation efforts, residents of El Prado look to change a state law to allow the unincorporated area to become a Historical Community.

At a Taos County Commission meeting Tuesday (Sept. 17) some El Prado's residents addressed commissioners and urged them to get on board with lobbying the state Legislature to change the current law that governs what can be a Historical Community.

The law mandates that an area must have 50,000 people in it to be eligible for such a designation. El Prado has about 3,000 residents.

Those who addressed the commission on the matter emphasized that El Prado deserves the title of Historical Community because its roots go back hundreds of years.

El Prado resident Kathy Còrdova told commissioners El Prado establishing itself as a Historical Community protects it against annexation from the town and also from big box stores such as Family Dollar moving into the area.

"Most residents don't value big box or corporate America in El Prado," she said.

The Federal Aviation Administration awarded a \$24 million grant to the town of Taos recently for work at the Taos airport. The town needs to come up with a \$1.2 million match for the grant.

In March the town moved to annex the airport and six miles of highway right-of-way to capture gross receipts tax money. Town officials said this was necessary to come up with the grant match. Taos County has filed two lawsuits to block the annexation.

Còrdova recently completed a 500-page book that documents the history of El Prado's established families. She said the book cost about \$1,000 to complete and community members donated the funds for the project. She said she interviewed 15 families, who shared memories such as the owner of Silva's grocery giving out free candy to the kids after they got out of school. "There exists a sense of *familia* among the established families," she said.

Her husband, Arsenio Còrdova, said El Prado residents plan to explore multiple avenues for preventing the town's annexation efforts. "Local government has declared manifest destiny on us, and they want to own everything from the town to the airport, and we will fight them," he said. "Politicians who don't support this kind of history will be historical, too."

Taos Mayor Darren Córdova said he values El Prado's history, but thinks El Prado residents are vying for a Historical Community for the wrong reasons.

"I do value El Prado's historic nature, but it's unfortunate that they're doing it for the wrong reasons," he said. "To prevent annexation, this conversation should have been done years ago."

The commission instructed county staff to lobby the Legislature to amend the law to allow not only El Prado but other small communities, such as Ca-òn and Llano Quemado, to be eligible for Historical Community status. This would prevent annexation from the town in those areas, too.

"These areas need to be protected," Commissioner Gabriel Romero said.

Commissioners said a new set of land use regulations are being drafted that would create an overlay for El Prado that would hopefully prevent annexation.

El Prado resident John Painter, who also spoke to commissioners at the Tuesday meeting, said the overall sentiment among El Prado residents is to fight against annexation.

"There is a strong, strong desire to have our independence out there in El Prado," he said.