



THE TAOS NEWS

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Town leaves energy code intact

By J.R. Logan

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After hearing testimony about the long-term benefits of building homes that use less energy, the Taos Town Council chose not to suspend a code that requires builders to meet high standards for energy efficiency.

The council considered an ordinance Tuesday (Oct. 22) that would have suspended part of the town code relating to energy-efficient construction. The code, first adopted in 2009, requires those wishing to build a home to have a certified inspect or review plans to ensure they meet specific energy efficiency goals before a building permit is issued. The code also requires an inspector to verify the constructed building meets those standards before a certificate of occupancy is issued.

The code allowed commercial buildings to meet benchmarks in “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design” (LEED) standards or “Home Energy Rating System” (HERS). Residential builders were required to meet only HERS standards, meaning they would need to find a certified HERS inspector.

The item was under consideration Tuesday because of complaints the town had received from builders who said it was hard to find certified inspectors, and the cost to meet the energy standards was overly burdensome. Town staff told the council builders have argued that the high efficiency requirements can increase building costs between 15 to 20 percent.

The names of the specific builders raising concerns were not mentioned at Tuesday’s meeting. Town planning director Martha Perkins did not return messages seeking comment.

During the discussion, the council heard from several people who argued while better insulation and other features needed to meet certain standards add to the up-front cost, they save a homeowner money on utilities in the long run. The council also heard HERS inspectors were available locally, meaning the approval process was not overly cumbersome.

Architect Joaquin Karcher told the council well-insulated homes are a “no brainer” that can pay for themselves in reduced energy costs within five years. Karcher said the actual increase to building costs to meet the town code is, at most, 5 percent.

Karcher is promoter of energy efficiency and supports the spirit of the town code, but he thinks it could be improved. Karcher told *The Taos News* he was urging the town to focus less on the administrative hoops of hiring inspectors to show specific ratings are met, and focus more on requiring builders to use better insulation and leak prevention that will clearly make buildings more efficient.

“You can basically save on that difficult administrative stuff and have the builder put the money he saves into improving the building’s envelope,” Karcher said.

The council chose to table the item and encouraged staff to work with local inspectors to ensure building wasn’t slowed by the code requirements.