



THE TAOS NEWS

In 2007 Voted Best Weekly Newspaper in the U.S. by the National Newspaper Assoc.

Proposed land use regs again met with opposition

By Elizabeth Cleary

The Taos News, 12/12/2013

Taos County has drafted a new land use code, and officials say they hope the process of its approval won't be steeped in confusion and opposition, as it was the last time the county tried to pass a land use code.

The first of a series of work sessions was held Monday night (Dec. 9). The purpose of the work sessions is to run through the "red line" version of the proposed regulations and give constituents the opportunity to ask questions. It's clear from Monday's meeting that some constituents are displeased and think the proposed regulations are too restrictive.

The most vocal of these constituents was Joe Torres. At the meeting, he expressed concern with neighborhood associations having a say in whether a developer receives a permit for a project, and claimed the proposed regulations would hinder business development. He said giving neighborhood associations a say gives people without a significant interest the power to create obstacles for developers.

"It's hard to fight that uphill battle," Torres said.

County resident Lawrence Baker disagreed, and said land owners are no longer so isolated from their neighbors that what they do doesn't affect those around them.

"I don't think we live in a vacuum anymore," she said.

Torres is a long-standing opponent to new regulations. In August 2012, when the county was pushing for a different set of regulations, Torres repeatedly spoke out against the document and demanded it be translated into Spanish. He also gathered hundreds of signatures for what he called the "La Gente" (the people) petition against the proposed ordinance.

This time around, the majority of Monday night's two-hour meeting was a back-and-forth between county officials and Torres.

"This is obviously something that is going to be debated," Taos County Commissioner Tom Blankenhorn told Torres.

Blankenhorn, who has spent months developing these regulations, said the main purpose for changing the current regulations is to better facilitate business development in the county.

Currently, businesses have to apply for special-use permits and go through a series of hearings before such a permit is granted, and this can be a lengthy process. But by allowing neighborhood associations to create “overlays” or zoning in certain areas of the county, they can designate commercial zones, which will simplify the process.

Blankenhorn said many of the regulations simply reiterate what the state and federal governments already require.

“We’re just trying to protect the things that everyone acknowledges are important to protect,” Blankenhorn said.

He said that last time the county tried to pass a code, neighborhood overlays and overall land use regulations were grouped together into one document, which created confusion. This time, the two are separated, so it’s clear where certain zoning regulations apply and where they do not.

About 15 people attended Monday night’s meeting.

The full “red line version” of the proposed land use regulations is available at

TaosCounty.org, along with a schedule of all of the work study sessions in which constituents have the opportunity to talk to commissioners about the proposal.

The next session will be held in the Taos County Commission chambers on Thursday (Dec. 12) at 6 p.m.