



THE TAOS NEWS

Best U.S. Weekly Paper- NNA 2007, 2008, 2010
Inland Press Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

Taos Ski Valley a step closer to base area makeover

By J.R. Logan

The Taos News, 3/6/2014

Taos Ski Valley, Inc. is planning early demolition this summer to prepare for the first step in a major renovation of the resort's base area.

The Village of Taos Ski Valley Planning and Zoning Commission gave the "Parcel G" project the green light during a well-attended meeting Monday (March 3).

Resort representatives, business owners and property owners at the meeting expressed overwhelming support for the project, arguing that it was an important part of updating the ski area and attracting new visitors.

As part of the project, crews are expected to take down a portion of the "Pagoda Building" located near the current skier drop-off in the coming months. The entire building currently houses a post office, ski rental shop and retail space. It will eventually be demolished to be replaced by a multi-level structure that will include a parking garage, skier services, retail space and residential units.

The project also includes the addition of more public space outdoors, including new plazas, river restoration, and an improved bridge across Lake Fork Creek, which will tie into a new entrance to the base area off of Thunderbird Drive.

Taos Ski Valley CEO Gordon Briner boasted about the resort's on-mountain terrain, but acknowledged that the existing base area design is lacking. "Everyone knows that our base area experience is not world class," Briner said.

One of the primary goals of the Parcel G project is to improve the appearance of the visitor arrival, which currently directs most visitors through a concrete tunnel out a roundabout series of stairs. Under the new design, visitors will look straight up Al's Run and have a stroll through open retail plazas on the way to the lift.

Members of the Blake family announced in December they were selling the resort to billionaire Louis Bacon because they could not afford the on- and off-mountain improvements they'd been planning for years.

Briner said Monday the installation of a new lift up Kachina Peak and the base area improvements were clear signs that the new ownership was ready to act. "A lot of dreams that we've had are going to start to become a reality," Briner said. Bacon representative Peter Talty said Monday the Parcel G project was a "critical first step" in redesigning the base area. Talty said his team of developers, architects and engineers were working with the village to resolve utilities issues, and he said one of the challenges has been the logistics of how to temporarily

relocate businesses and services in the Pagoda building to a property across the creek during construction.

Those details have yet to be completely ironed out. Monday's approval means the developers can apply for demolition and building permits associated with the project.

Major reconstruction of the new building isn't planned until next year and is expected to take 18 months.

The resort plans to redirect arrival traffic to the new dropoff point near the Pizza Shack off Thunderbird Road starting next ski season.

Meeting attendees raised various concerns and questions about the project, though no one expressed explicit opposition to the proposal. Comments included concerns about flood plain studies and ensuring that the views of adjacent property owners weren't affected.

Don Schieber, community development director for the village government, told the crowd the village has enough water and water rights to handle the additional demand from the redevelopment.

Schieber said the current wastewater treatment plant should be able to handle the additional 15,000 to 18,000 gallons of daily sewage the new building is expected to produce. Schieber said the facility will likely need to be upgraded once the entire base area redevelopment is complete.

Planning commission member Elisabeth Brownell asked Talty Monday if he was talking with other developers in the base area to ensure that architectural styles and design matched in the base area.

Talty responded that the village, not an individual developer, has the authority to enforce the general design guidelines set by a 2010/2012 Master Plans, which are meant to serve as a blueprint for the base area as a whole.