

Hearing set to consider land use regs

By Elizabeth Cleary

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After months of delays, the county commission has set a hearing date to decide whether to pass an overhaul of its land use regulations.

In a 3-1 vote Tuesday (May 20), the commission voted to set a June 10 hearing date to consider the new rules. Commissioner Joe Mike Duran cast the opposing vote and commissioner Larry Sánchez was absent.

The resolution went to a vote with little discussion.

The advertisement announcing the hearing will run in the May 29 edition of The Taos News, and the ordinance will be available on TaosCounty.org and at the county offices the same day. County Attorney Bob Malone told The Taos News the statute for adopting county ordinances mandates the announcement must run once a week for at least two consecutive weeks in the newspaper. The document must also be available for public viewing starting on the first day of publication in the newspaper. By setting a June 10 hearing date the county is right under the wire in terms of following what the law requires.

In early 2012, the commission voted to “drop” changes to the land use code after residents turned out in opposition to the proposals. Critics said the process was too rushed, and that had been left out of the planning process. Supporters said the opposition was based on misinformation.

Duran told The Taos News he doesn't think most people in the county are for the new regulations.

“I've always been opposed to it and I'm going to stick to my guns,” he said.

Since commissioners Tom Blankenhorn and Gabe Romero took office in January 2013, the county has been slowly working toward addressing the issue.

During the winter, the county held a number of sessions throughout Taos County intended to inform constituents of the proposed ordinance and hear their concerns. Opponents of the ordinance have said the new regulations would be too restrictive while proponents say it will create smoother processes to obtain permits for businesses and construction projects.

This time around, changes to the code will not include neighborhood overlays, which would have, for the first time, established zoning in certain parts of the county. Overlays would have only existed in places where neighborhood associations had established specific limits on things such as minimum lot sizes and setbacks.

The code up for consideration in June will not include overlays, but will make room for overlays to be adopted in the future.

Commissioner Dan Barrone, who was elected mayor of Taos in March, has said he plans to give up his commission seat after a new land use code is passed.