

County mulling options for courthouse

By Cody Hooks

The Taos News, 8/21/2014

The ongoing negotiations over the fate of the Old County Courthouse and its tenants will continue for weeks to come. Taos County commissioners decided at their Tuesday (Aug. 19) meeting to formally explore several possibilities for leasing the space downstairs at fair-market value.

Commissioner Tom Blankenhorn said the county will offer leases at a fair-market value to the current downstairs tenants, who currently lease the space for less than its true market value.

One alternative option would open bidding for a new anchor tenant or commercial occupant. Another would open bidding for a management company, which would then operate the downstairs and make decisions regarding tenants. County staff will explore and make recommendations about viability of these options at a future commission meeting.

Blankenhorn explained to *The Taos News* that if the county were to lease space to tenants for in-kind services rather than payment, the county would have to open that option to the general public with an RFP. "We can't just pick and choose a nonprofit and then write them a lease," he said. The commission didn't make a decision regarding tenants providing in-kind services.

Several members of the public in attendance spoke about the need to ensure arts and cultural institutions and programs remain in the building, rather than hand the space over to a purely commercial enterprise. One woman further suggested that regardless of which option the county chooses to pursue, the upstairs mural room needs a house manager to be in charge of security and coordinating events.

One person suggested KRZA (88.7 FM), a community radio station serving Northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, could operate a one-room station out of the courthouse. Archuleta said county staff was open to discussing options with interested parties from the community.

Commissioner and Mayor Dan Barrone said the town is still interested in partnering with the county, whether that be jointly working to hire a grant writer to procure funds for further renovations, or in some other capacity.

