

## **Airport project remains in holding pattern**

**By J.R. Logan**

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The Taos County Planning Department has twice determined the town had not provided enough information to approve or deny an application to build a second runway at the Taos Regional Airport.

For the second time, acting planning director Edward Vigil has asked the town to make adjustments to its application or provide additional information before he can deem the application “complete.” Such a determination must be made before Vigil can approve or deny the application.

Taos County officials have said the town’s permit can be approved “administratively,” meaning the planning director alone can give it the go ahead without requiring public hearings.

The town filed a permit application to do the project right before a group of six Taos-ers filed a lawsuit to halt the project until the town and county addressed zoning issues in the area around the airport. The plaintiffs in the case assert the local governments have failed to do sufficient planning and offer fair notice to surrounding property owners. Both governments have countered in court records that they are under no obligation to adopt zoning before crews can break ground.

No hearing date had been set as of press time for District Judge Jeff McElroy to consider a motion to halt any work at the airport until zoning issues are resolved.

The \$24 million airport expansion has been decades in the making but has long been stalled by opponents — most notably Taos Pueblo. The tribe gave its consent for the project in late 2012, but critics continue to fight the project for myriad reasons ranging from environmental concerns about increased air traffic to claims that the expansion will cater only to the wealthy.

The town and supporters of the project counter that it’s vital to public safety and is long overdue.

Nearly the entire cost of the project is being covered by grants from the federal and state governments.