

## Old courthouse renovations potentially within reach

By Cody Hooks

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The long debate over the Old County Courthouse has focused not only on how the space ought to be used, but also how to pay for necessary renovations. Taos County government might soon help resolve the latter half of that equation.

At a work study session of the Board of Commissioners on Tuesday (Jan. 27), county officials said up to \$1 million could be made available for repairs and renovations to the Old County Courthouse in the next three to four months by refinancing a loan tied to the Juan I. Gonzalez Agricultural Center.

The county originally financed the ag center loan in 1997 at 5 percent interest. Refinancing the loan is beneficial now because of what Commissioner Tom Blankenhorn called historically low interest rates.

Taos County Manager Stephen Archuleta offered a more conservative estimate of the money to be garnered from that deal — somewhere between \$500,000 and \$750,000.

In addition to the \$150,000 to \$200,000 needed to complete a handful of projects at the agricultural center, Richard Sanchez, with the county facilities department, estimated renovations at the Old County Courthouse would run between \$400,000 and \$500,000.

Movement on renovations to the Old County Courthouse, which is located on Taos Plaza but owned by Taos County, has stalled at various points because of a general lack of funding. While county officials would still need to develop a financially viable management plan in accordance with anti-donation statues and the community's needs, the refinancing of the agricultural center would remove a substantial roadblock towards making that space being a more lively and useful part of the downtown area.

Blankenhorn told those in attendance at Tuesday's meeting that this is the first opportunity in years to bring in and allocate a significant amount of money for the Old County Courthouse. "The stars are definitely aligned," he said.