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UNM-Taos downtown renovations remains stalled

By Cody Hooks

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According to officials with University of New Mexico-Taos, renovations slated for two downtown buildings are in limbo for a while longer.

Rio Grande and Baatan Halls are currently owned by the town of Taos. UNM-Taos is set to acquire the buildings for \$1 — a symbolic transfer of property that hinges on final approval from the State Board of Finance and Administration.

That final approval was set to go before the board at its March 17 meeting. But all higher education items were removed because, according to a spokesperson for the state Department of Finance and Administration, certain members of the board also had duties at the Legislature and couldn't fully review the proposals beforehand.

Furthermore, the spokesperson said, Gov. Susana Martinez, who chairs the board, wanted to be present for all higher education items but couldn't.

The New Mexico Legislature wrapped up its regular session March 21 without passing a capital outlay bill that would have funded millions of dollars worth of projects around the state; \$2.7 million of that would have gone to Taos County.

The UNM-Taos renovations were financed by an education bond passed by voters in November.

According to Bill Knief, communications director for UNM-Taos, the campus has \$4.6 million ready to spend on the renovations, which are projected to supply the area with 40-60 construction jobs for 12-18 months.

Renovations cannot begin until the transfer has final approval. It is possible, but not guaranteed, the UNM-Taos renovations and other higher education items will come before the board April 21.