



Editorial

State needs to make another step for UNM-Taos expansion

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In November, voters statewide passed a \$141 million bond to fund construction and remodeling projects at higher education institutions.

Taos had good reason to be among them. The University of New Mexico- Taos is slated to get \$4 million to fix the Rio Grande and Bataan halls on Civic Plaza Drive to expand its campus downtown. We look forward to seeing those under-occupied buildings owned by the town put to good use. The plan is to create a Health Services Training Center, which would include UNM-Taos' nursing program.

UNM-Taos officials estimate the project would generate 40-60 construction jobs for 12-18 months. Certainly this is good news for those in that industry, which has yet to rebound from the great recession.

Plus this is a great deal for the college. The selling price from the town to the university is only a buck.

Ah, but the wheels of state government move exceedingly slow. Voters first had to approve the bond and the New Mexico Board of Regents had to weigh in, which it did favorably.

Now the holdup is approval by the state Department of Finance and Administration.

The project cannot move forward without the department's approval. But higher education projects were removed from the agenda of a meeting March 17 because board members were called away to the legislative session.

Now word is that the Department of Finance and Administration may take it up April 21. We certainly hope so. The transfer of ownership can't go through until that happens.

Taos has a lot to gain from this downtown expansion.

When it's done, we will have classrooms for career-oriented programs and we hope, create a bit of a college feel as students and faculty mill about restaurants and stores.

Then, there is the small but badly needed boost to the local construction.

Best yet, here is an opportunity to enrich the lives of local people. Too often we think about ways to make Taos attractive to visitors. But this project would improve downtown for local residents and make our town a more livable place.

Good jobs. Educational opportunities. Activity downtown.

Now all we ask is for the state Department of Finance and Administration to give its OK.