



Old County Courthouse to get \$500K

By Cody Hooks

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A plan to jumpstart renovations at the Old County Courthouse is moving ahead.

On April 23, the New Mexico Finance Authority Board approved a plan by Taos County to refinance a loan on the Juan I. Gonzalez Agricultural Center. The refinanced loan will free up nearly \$750,000 — half a million of that is slated to start making the Old County Courthouse on the Plaza compliant with the American with Disabilities Act.

According to Leandro Cordova, finance director for the county, this initial influx of money will pay for the final designs, an elevator, ADA-compliant bathrooms, improvements to the roof and other basic repairs.

Cordova estimated it would take at least \$1.5 million to complete all needed renovations at the Old County Courthouse, though those numbers could change once the final studies and plans are completed.

In recent years, the management and future of the historic property — a county-owned property with WPA-era murals adorning the upstairs walls — has been a point of contention between the county and town of Taos governments.

But Taos County Commissioner Jim Fambro called the plan “very innovative thinking” that will now enable the county to “finally be able to make some progress that’s long overdue.”

While Fambro acknowledged the plan will only finance part of the renovations at the Old County Courthouse, he said the initial thrust should act as stimulation to get the rest of the project rolling. “That’s eventually going to take some kind of grant or something,” he said.

The refinanced loan to the agricultural center reduces the terms of the loan from 22 to 21 years and from 5 to 2.5 percent interest.

About \$250,000 of the freedup money will go toward completing renovations at ag center first approved six years ago.

As part of its approval, the New Mexico Finance Authority Board stipulated all tenants at the Old County Courthouse must pay fair-market value for the space they rent, a practice that hasn’t been evenly used in the past and a point that has been a point of contention during county commission discussions.