



Airport permit hearing June 9

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Opponents of the Taos Regional Airport expansion will have another opportunity to voice their concerns at a public hearing Tuesday (June 9), 9 a.m. in the county administrative complex on Albright Street.

The Taos County Commission is scheduled to consider whether to uphold the approval of a construction permit for the expansion, which consists primarily in the creation of a second runway at the facility northwest of town.

The hearing is prompted by an appeal filed by a group of Taos County residents who argue the expansion violates the county's land use regulations. Specifically, they say zoning around the airport perimeter is inadequate, and they worry the construction of a second, longer runway could lead to safety problems and decreased property values.

The same group lost an appeal based on similar arguments in March. The Taos County Planning Commission unanimously voted to uphold the approval of the permit, which was initially granted by the acting Taos County planning director in late 2014.

A lawsuit filed in Taos District Court by members of the same group also failed to make much progress. District court judge Jeff McElroy rejected a request for an order to halt work until additional zoning was put in place.

In his decision, McElroy told the plaintiffs to exhaust the appeals process at the county level before asking the court to step in.

The hearing before the county commission is the last step in that administrative appeals process.

Work on the new runway continues unimpeded while the various appeals are heard.

The \$24 million project is being funded almost entirely by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Crews broke ground on the project in February after nearly 30 years of debate over whether the project was necessary.

Supporters of the project maintain it will improve safety for pilots and better position Taos for economic development.

But opponents contend the project will lead to increased pollution, exacerbate Taos' wealth gap and open the door to an additional military presence in the region.