



Airport project faces suits from opponents, bidder

By J.R. Logan

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Opponents of the Taos Regional Airport expansion have given notice they plan to appeal approval of the project. That notice comes a week after a Colorado Springs contractor filed a separate lawsuit alleging the bidding process for the project was flawed.

An attorney for John Nichols, Dilia Martinez, Phillip Reyna, Ernest Concha, Daniel Romero and Bonnie Korman filed the notice of appeal in district court in Taos, Monday (Sept. 21). The two-page notice does not give any details as to the argument the plaintiffs intend to make in their appeal.

The controversial expansion has been nearly 30 years in the making and includes primarily the construction of a second, longer runway. Critics argue the runway will add to Taos' wage gap, poses a risk to public safety and will add to pollution in the area. Supporters counter the project will make the airport safer and better position the region for economic development.

The airport is owned and operated by the town of Taos, but Taos County government had to give the project a permit to go ahead with construction.

The county repeatedly approved the project after a series of appeals by the same group. Most recently, in July, the Taos County Commission gave the project the green light in a 3-1 vote.

Before that ruling, opponents of the project failed to convince a judge to halt construction when it filed a lawsuit in January arguing the county was obliged to adopt more stringent zoning regulations in the vicinity of the airport to protect property values and ensure the safety of nearby residents.

But Judge Jeff McElroy disagreed, and allowed the project to go forward.

While the appeals process grinds on, crews continue work at the airport site. The first phase of the project began early this year, and the remaining funding to complete the second runway and related work was recently awarded to the town.

The pending lawsuit from opponents seeking to halt the runway construction isn't the only legal challenge surrounding the project. Last week, a Colorado Springs contractor that bid on doing the airport work filed a lawsuit in Taos alleging the town failed to include all relevant information in the bid packet, giving an unfair advantage to Taos-based Northern Mountain Contractors, which was awarded the contract for the project.