

Zoning change would allow taller Taos hotels

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The town of Taos is proposing zoning changes that would allow for the construction of large-scale “Taos-style” hotels that exceed the town’s current height restriction.

The town council is expected to consider the changes at a special meeting Aug. 29.

The changes are part of a new “hotel overlay zone” proposed by the town’s planning department.

The overlay would apply only to existing “highway corridor protection district” (HCPD) zones. There are currently two HCPD zones — one along Paseo del Pueblo Sur near Este Es Road and another on the south side of Paseo del Ca-òn across from the Taos Youth and Family Center.

The town’s current zoning limits the height of structures in that zone to 27 feet.

The proposed overlay zone would allow for taller buildings that meet certain design standards. The proposed changes would allow for four-story hotels that reach as high as 50 feet.

The overlay would not change the requirements of the HCPD zone, but would be in addition to those limitations.

The overlay would also require that hotels conform to the “Pueblo, Spanish Revival” design. As an example, planners point to the Loretto Inn in Santa Fe, which has terraced levels that mimic the iconic buildings of Taos Pueblo.

Town staff members say the changes are necessary to accommodate the development of modern hotels.

“From an economic development standpoint, we need to do something in the realm of hotels,” said Louis Fineberg, town planning director, adding that most hotel owners today find it difficult to build under four stories.

That was true for a developer who saw the planning commission reject an application to build a Holiday Inn Express at the south end of town.

At a meeting in July, the commission chose not to recommend the application, which proposed an 85-room hotel just north of the existing Hampton Inn by Hilton – Taos, located at 1515 Paseo del Pueblo Sur. As designed, the hotel would have been 53,000 square feet, consisting of four stories reaching 53 feet.

The planning commission ultimately recommended the application be denied. “It was painful not to approve it,” said Doug Patterson, a member of the planning commission, at an Aug. 3 meeting.

At the same meeting, the town's fire marshal shared an anecdote that the existing two-story height limit was originally put in place because the fire department's ladder truck could only reach that high. The fire marshal said he wasn't certain that was true, but he noted that the department is now equipped to protect structures as high as six stories.

Opponents of the Holiday Inn plan spoke against the proposal at the July meeting and applauded the commission's decision. At its Aug. 6 meeting, the town planning and zoning commission unanimously recommended the hotel overlay zone be adopted by the town council.



A rendering of the Holiday Inn Express that a hotelier hoped to build next to the Hampton Inn. The application was rejected.

Courtesy Jay Batra

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