



THE TAOS NEWS

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Editorial

Council should oppose taller hotels

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Twenty-three feet. And it's looking like there could be about 23 hours of public debate before all is said and done.

At issue is whether the town of Taos should allow for hotel heights on the south end of town to reach 50 feet (about four stories). We believe they should not allow it. The current limit is 27 feet (about two stories). The debate, then, is about 23 feet. But of course the debate is about much more than a measurement in our small mountain town.

The Taos Town Council this week held a public hearing on the matter, and after about five hours of debate among themselves and the public, decided to defer a decision until Oct. 11. The delay will likely benefit those who are against the proposed "hotel overlay zone," which is in the area along Paseo del Pueblo Sur, going south from about Este Es Road to the town's southern boundary.

Under the proposal, four-story hotels would be allowed at the southern end of town.

Opponents of the proposal argue that larger corporate or franchise-owned hotels would be nothing but a blight on small-town charm and second-to-none views. We agree.

But supporters say Taos needs to modernize its hotel stock, and this is one way to do it. They also say we need outside investment and jobs, even if they are temporary construction jobs, and then hospitality jobs that generally pay a lower than average wage. We think that the argument is an exaggeration. The proposed overlay zone would ruin Taos' character. It also would not solve Taos' troubled hotel industry.

At its heart, this isn't a complicated issue. You're either for taller hotels or you're not.

But after five hours of exhaustive debate, town councilors failed to make a decision. They voted to punt to October because, they say, they didn't have enough information and public input to make a decision.

They do. We think the delay gives political cover to councilors who were too timid to act.

It's time for councilors to exercise leadership and decide to scrap the hotel overlay zone. Taos as it exists today is better off without a lifting of the current height restriction. The town is better off not risking long term hits to its charm.

Is there a compromise? The town already backed down from a proposed zone on the south side of Paseo del Ca-òn across from the Taos Youth and Family Center. We think that was the right move and that it should also apply to the rest of the proposed zone.

Town councilors, regardless of politics, need to make a decision. They need to make a decision so that developers know where they stand. They need to make a decision so the public can take a deep breath and move on to the next important issue.

