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Petition update

Stunning Defeat

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The charm, character, scale and ambiance of Taos has been forever changed.

On Tuesday night, Oct. 11th, three of the Town Council members voted to raise the height of buildings that can be built in Taos from 27 feet without a permit and 40 feet with a permit to 48 feet, essentially allowing 4 story hotels. Councilors Fritz Hahn and Nathaniel Evans voted for the ordinance while Councilors Judi Cantu and Darien Fernandez voted against. Mayor Dan Barrone broke the tie by voting yes.

Although the 48-foot height ceiling currently applies only to the 139 acres on either side of Pueblo Sur (called the Hotel Overlay Zone or HOZ), this move sets a dangerous precedent. It is only the naive who think that these tall buildings will always be contained to this one area. The 48-foot limit can be measured from artificial ground levels and does not include the parapet. Thus, the total height of the buildings could possibly reach 60-70 feet when completed. It is also naive to think that the government will be able to restrict these tall buildings to hotels alone. Developers can make a case for office buildings, etc. as well.

During the 5-hour hearing, 90% of the people in attendance spoke against the ordinance. Even though representatives from the Pueblo spoke passionately and eloquently about the tradition that no building be built higher than the Pueblo, their words fell on three sets of deaf ears. The President of the Ranchos Neighborhood Association, which is officially in the County but abuts the HOZ, also spoke in opposition. His plea fell on deaf ears too. Many others spoke eloquently against but it became obvious that the decision had been made before the meeting had even begun and that no amount of citizen participation citing the many practical and aesthetic reasons to turn down the proposal was going to change the outcome. Indeed, it appeared that the motion made by Councilor Evans and quickly seconded by Councilor Hahn had already been written out before the meeting.

This message serves only as an update on the HOZ issue. Expect to hear more on this subject as well as the Smiths Marketplace project which we are told is coming back but has not yet surfaced.