

New ordinance would address unsafe, unsanitary Taos structures

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The Taos Town Council was expected to vote this week on an ordinance that would tighten rules for the maintenance of structures in town limits.

The council was scheduled to meet Nov. 22, after press time.

The regulations would mostly follow the “International Property Maintenance Code,” with some minor changes. As written, the town ordinance states that the code is meant to ensure buildings are “safe, sanitary and fit for occupation and use.”

It spells out a process for addressing “dangerous buildings, structures and properties unfit for human occupancy or use of posing an existing or potential health, safety or general welfare threat to the public.”

In general, the code gives more teeth to the town to control derelict buildings or properties in the town limits.

The code stipulates that those who violate it can be charged a fine of \$300 a day.

At least part of the impetus for adopting the code is the town administration’s belief that some businesses in Taos — especially a few hotel properties — have been neglected.

In September, the Eighth Judicial District Attorney Donald Gallegos sent a letter to the owner of the Indian Hills Inn, alleging that the property had become a “public nuisance.” Gallegos threatened to file a lawsuit against the hotel’s owner if he refused to address alleged problems at the hotel.

But that sort of extreme measure might not be necessary if the town adopts the maintenance code and finds a way to enforce it.

Town manager Rick Bellis has said adopting the property maintenance code would give the town enforcement authority to cite hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts and retail/commercial structures as well.

At this point, however, the town does not have an employee who would be able to enforce either the building code or the maintenance code.

Last fall, the town of Taos lost its building inspection authority because of a change in state rules related to how inspectors are certified. The state took over inspection duties for the town.

To enforce the new ordinance, the town would need its own certified building inspector.

Bellis has said that a current employee is now training to be certified. If that falls through, he said the town could ask another municipality or local government that does have an inspector to do those duties in Taos.

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Gallegos has said the Indian Hills Inn property has become a “public nuisance.”

Katharine Egli

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