

## Arroyo Hondo residents challenge helipad approval

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Three Arroyo Hondo residents are challenging the Taos County planning department's approval of a permit for a privately funded helicopter landing pad along Hondo-Seco Road.

Edmund Healy, an Arroyo Hondo resident, received a special use permit in 2012 for the construction of a private road and bridge on his property. That permit made no mention of a helipad.

Nevertheless, construction began on the helipad's retaining walls in 2015.

At the beginning of 2016, when the helipad was partially built, Healy told *The Taos News* he thought the county had no authority to regulate the helipad or stop him from building it under the county's land use regulations.

However, Healy submitted a permit application to the county in August seeking approval for the helipad, a 50-foot-by-50-foot concrete slab, and a 14-space parking lot. Both the helipad and parking lot are intended for exclusive use by the Hondo-Seco Volunteer Fire Department (which is located across the road from the construction site). The application included an analysis by the Federal Aviation Administration dated Aug. 5 that found the helipad "will not adversely affect the safe and efficient use of airspace by aircraft," according to the planning department's written decision.

Taos County Planning Director Edward Vigil approved the permit application in December. That decision argued the helipad will benefit for the surrounding community in emergency situations because the nearest helipads are located about 10 miles away. Furthermore, the decision states the helipad and parking area will not have a "substantial impact on the immediate neighborhood."

The approval came with 21 conditions the applicant must meet, which include putting in place a lease agreement with the Hondo-Seco Volunteer Fire Department for general operations and future maintenance and repairs for the site.

But Raymond Trujillo, president of the Arroyo Hondo Community Association, Eli Sanchez and Patricia Trujillo appealed that decision, resulting in a public hearing March 2.

That hearing was continued to the Wednesday (April 12) meeting of the county planning commission, which will take place at 6 p.m. at Taos County's commission chambers, 105 Albright St., Taos.



**The construction site of the privately funded, partially finished helipad along Hondo-Seco Road, which is intended to be used exclusively by the Hondo-Seco Volunteer Fire Department for emergency purposes.**

**Cody Hooks**



**The retaining walls of the privately funded, partially finished helipad along Hondo-Seco Road. The Taos County planning department's administrative approval said the helipad would have no "substantial impact on the immediate neighborhood."**

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