

## **Historic Taos Plaza: Town plants trees, considers structure upgrades**

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The town of Taos celebrated Arbor Day Friday (April 28) in several ways that could potentially change the way the historic Taos Plaza looks for future generations.

The Taos Historic Preservation Commission met Friday morning in a special session to hear a presentation from Facilities and Special Events Director Mitch Miller regarding a proposal to refurbish the Plaza and the gazebo to make the area safer and update the architecture. The meeting was followed in the afternoon by an Arbor Day celebration honoring an old cottonwood in the Plaza that is scheduled to be cut down.

Friday's presentation by Miller before the commission, which is part of the preliminary planning phase, proposes remodeling portions of the Plaza. Any such changes will have to be approved by the town council after public hearings.

During the meeting, Commissioner David Henry expressed concern over the proposed changes to the Plaza. He thought some of the changes might look too modern to fit its historic nature.

Taos Town Manager Rick Bellis said plans for the Plaza were in the early discussion stages. "It seems there is going to be a long delay in getting a consensus for getting things done – and the money to do so," said Bellis during the meeting. "This is mostly about maintenance."

The plan to change the gazebo on the Plaza must be approved by the Historic Preservation Board and will have to be kept to the historical standards of the commission. Miller proposed a new removable stage deck addition to the gazebo, as well as the replacement of many bricks in the Plaza, which have been damaged over the years.

"Our goal is to maintain the Plaza and keep it safe," said Miller.

The renovations would take an estimated six to eight weeks once they are approved, but according to Miller, any construction would be conducted in a way to avoid disrupting the everyday activity in the area.

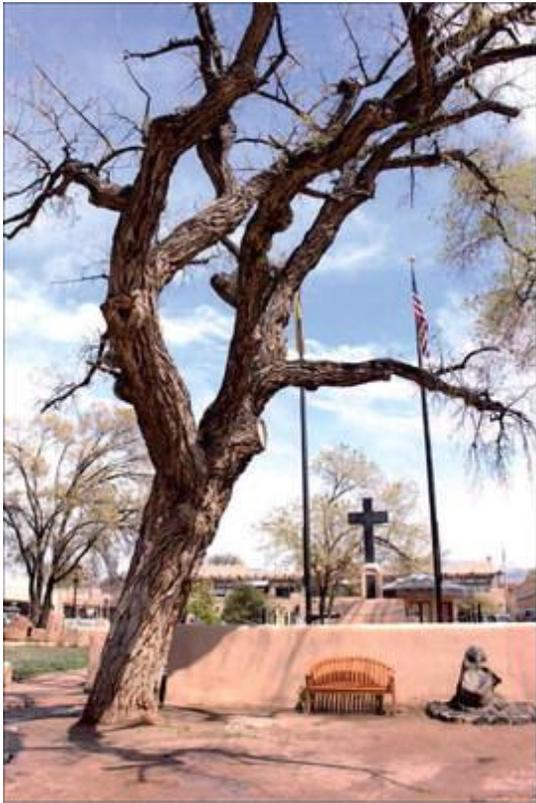
The next Historic Preservation Commission meeting to discuss changes to the Plaza will be in late May or June.

Part of the renovations will begin immediately. Those renovations include planting several young trees in the Plaza to replace older trees, like the cottonwood, that are scheduled to be removed.

The historic cottonwood in the center of Taos Plaza, which local arborists estimate was planted around the 1890s, is "at the end of its days" and must come down, Taos officials and arborists have said. Mayor Dan Barrone and others recognized the old cottonwood's importance to the town in a ceremony celebrating Arbor Day on Friday.

“The removal of this tree, sad as it is, is really looking to the future of what [Taos Plaza] is going to be,” said Taos Tree Board Chairman Ben Wright during the celebration. “We’re celebrating this tree for what it’s given to Taos over the years.”

Beginning Tuesday (May 2), the town planned to plant new trees as part of the revitalization effort. According to Miller, the town also will begin planting grass and installing an electrical system on the northeast corner of the Plaza to power Christmas lights and the gazebo. While the grass is growing, Miller said the town would erect a chain-link fence around the sod to give the vegetation time to mature and grow.



**The cottonwood in the center of Taos Plaza has been approved for removal and is scheduled to be taken down. The historic tree has seen more than 100 years of history in the Plaza and is believed to have been planted in the late 1800s.**

**Jesse Moya**

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