



THE TAOS NEWS

Best U.S. Weekly Paper- NNA 2007, 2008, 2010
Inland Press Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

Batra asks town council for delay on hotel vote

By Jesse Moya, jmoya@taosnews.com

The Taos News, 6/29/2017

In a regular meeting Tuesday (June 27), the Taos Town Council voted unanimously to postpone the vote on a proposed four-story Holiday Inn Express at the recommendation of the project's developer, Jay Batra.

The council voted to move the vote on the large-scale hotel developmental permit and the provisional permit for the hotel to an Aug. 8 meeting.

Impassioned opponents and supporters of the hotel spoke for more than three hours on the proposed hotel during public comments, where Dan Barrone, mayor of Taos, extended the three-minute speaking time slightly at times for people to finish their thoughts. There was a clear divide between citizens who wanted the hotel, wanting a different aesthetic and not wanting the project to be built at all. After being questioned by members of the council and listening to several members of the public speak, Batra asked the council for a continuation of the meeting and for the vote to be postponed.

"I didn't want this to be a battle," Batra said during the meeting. "If there is an alternative, I will explore that and make that happen."

Batra said he would take the issue to InterContinental Hotels Group, the owner of the Holiday Inn franchise, and return with more information regarding the design of the hotel and even touched on the option of exploring a three-story option to please town residents.

While council members nodded in approval, public comment was not over and the rest of the people in the audience who wished to speak were allowed to voice their concerns or praise. Some of those yet to speak stated that they had slightly changed their notes upon Batra requesting a continuation for the vote, even shaking his hand before going up to speak. Before Batra's decision, citizens in the Taos Town Council Chambers were pitted on sides during the meeting, with several wanting the change of the hotel and many calling for a project that fits more with Taos' culture.

"I think you don't want to see change," Dale Grace told the crowd. "Change is going to happen – or your children are going to leave."

Grace is project manager for another Batra project in Taos: the renovation of the Don Fernando Hotel.

The debate over the four-story Holiday Inn Express has been an issue in Taos for nearly two years. Opponents and supporters have sent passionate messages of their opinions to town leaders. Many in Taos say a new hotel is needed to attract businesses and visitors, both important to the town's economic growth. Others feel the jobs the hotel will bring won't provide a living wage for employees.

While Batra said during the meeting that around 80 percent of the jobs at the Holiday Inn Express will be fulltime positions with some benefits, depending on qualifications, some members of the crowd and council were not pleased with the idea of jobs that would start at around \$9.50 per hour.

“You’re bringing jobs, but you’re bringing jobs that keep people in a system of poverty at the end of the day,” Councilman Darien Fernandez said to Batra during the meeting.

The hotel passed the Planning and Zoning Commission on May 18, which recommended that Taos Town Council approve the permits for it. While the hotel meets all the specific needs for a building of its kind in the “Hotel Overlay Zone” on Paseo del Pueblo Sur, Batra said he didn’t want to cause a divide in Taos and said he will work to possibly make it more along the lines of what residents are wanting.

“We need growth in our community,” said resident Jessica Greenfield. “We need places we can put our visiting family members.”



Residents gather to participate in Taos Town Council’s public hearing of the Holiday Inn Express approval. Developer Jay Batra called for a continuation of the meeting Tuesday (June 27) so he could gather more information and attempt to work with the company to address concerns some people in the town have.

Jesse Moya
