

Editorial

Reconsidering four stories

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Taosenos turned out in droves Tuesday (June 27) at a town council meeting to voice their opinions about a proposed four-story Holiday Inn Express.

Some people supported the project. Many did not.

But almost all of them acknowledged Taos needs more, newer and better hotel rooms at prices the average family (not those who make more than \$100,000 a year) can afford.

They just don't think building the first four-story hotel in Taos – which would be built in a recently created "Hotel Overlay Zone," where the town changed an ordinance to allow taller buildings – is the right move. A three-story hotel would be fine, said speaker after speaker.

To his credit, the proposed hotel's developer, Jay Batra, suggested four hours into Tuesday's meeting that a vote on the project be delayed a month. After town councilors questioned the need for four stories – questions that should have been asked much more forcefully months ago – Batra offered to go back to the Holiday Inn Express corporate offices and ask for documentation showing the reasons a 48-foot-tall, 85-room hotel is the only feasible option.

If the office can't provide viable reasons, then it should acknowledge that a three-story Holiday Inn Express is plausible.

The town council agreed. We applaud Batra, the council and the people who turned out for the meeting on both sides of the issue.

We make another suggestion for the town while Batra is seeking corporate documents. The town should hire a couple of different local commercial building experts and a hotel expert to go to every old hotel in town and provide an estimate of the cost to renovate those buildings to modern standards. The estimate should include the price that would have to be charged on the renovated rooms to recuperate the costs.

Batra can provide some insight. He's renovating the old Don Fernando Hotel, with the help of an economic development grant and other investments. He also renovated the Hampton Inn.

Several people at Tuesday's council meeting said the town should get hotel owners to fix up existing ones.

We think they might be surprised how much it costs to fix up an old hotel, one reason no other investors have stepped forward with offers to do so.