

Vote for controversial Taos-area subdivision delayed

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The Taos News, 11/9/2017

The town of Taos planning and zoning commission Nov. 1 voted to continue a preliminary hearing on the controversial Camino Fiesta subdivision until Jan. 3. The subdivision, proposed for a parcel of land near Taos Pizza Outback and adjacent to a well-known pasture off Paseo del Pueblo Norte, has caused a stir with neighbors. Applicant Lloyd Abrams and developers Abeyta Engineering have proposed a 49-lot, single-family-home subdivision on the 16.5 acre plot of land.

"I think it's cookie-cutter," said commissioner Pavel Lukes of the project. "I think its urban sprawl, something that we don't need in Taos."

The land is zoned R-14 within Taos town codes, which could allow for several multifamily dwellings or apartment complexes – a density of up to 231 units. The applicants, though, designed the development with fewer dwellings, all single family residences, meeting the town's R-3 and R-4 density standards. There is some question as to whether or not the applicants will need to request a re-zoning of the property for the development.

Each lot in the proposed subdivision would average .229 acres. Along with the lots, the plan includes an open space walking path necessary for development within the codes. The lots would hook up to the town sewer and water system.

"Those multifamily dwellings, that the town council decided they wanted in this particular area when they passed this zone, would have provided greater density, but a smaller footprint on the land," said commission chairman Jim Pollard. "It would have protected the view-shed more than we have now with this sprawl development that we have. It would have actually provided the opportunity for more affordable housing, by the nature of building multifamily dwellings."

The commission voted unanimously Nov. 1 to continue the preliminary design hearing, pending a state Department of Transportation access permit, and a driveway design.

Completing a project of this type and population density is not new to Taos, however the area around the field borders residential and small-scale agricultural land in an area of town that many of the commission and public said was a congested traffic area. According to members of the public who spoke out during the meeting, the area just north of Cid's Grocery Store has been the site of several auto collisions in the past, and residents do not wish for that number to increase. The estimated \$1 million project start is on hold pending the trafficsafety study to determine the safest option for future residents of the area to drive in and out of the narrow entrance to the property onto Paseo del Pueblo Norte.



In green, the property listed as the potential Camino Fiesta subdivision with an added easement connecting the property to Paseo del Pueblo Norte. In yellow, the Mitchell pasture, known as Corral No 5. The Mitchell property will not be developed by applicants for the Camino Fiesta subdivision. Property boundaries are approximations.

A site traffic analysis was obtained by engineer Alex Abetya and his client for the subdivision from Civil Transformations, which determined that the proposed project would not have a significant impact to traffic in the area. While the study did not focus on the road into the subdivision, and rather was intended for the area in front of the entrance, Abeyta said the traffic would be no different than other areas in town.

“We understand there is a lot of traffic on U.S. 64 on this reach, but there also is a lot of traffic from the (old) Blinking Light all the way to Ranchos (de Taos),” Abeyta said during his presentation. “This little reach is no different than any of the other reaches and we have been able to get highway access permits for different projects, so we are confident we will be able to get this permit.”

According to Abeyta, the ground-breaking date for the project will be April or May of 2018, pending any sort of hiccups with the project. While the project meets all the specifications from the Taos planning department, the commission first has to recommend approval and the town council has to give the green light before the development can move forward.

If the development is approved, Abeyta said the first step would be to complete the basic infrastructure, including pavement, curbs and storm drainage canals, before any sort of housing construction begins on the property.

Neighbors also were concerned about the impact of the development on wetlands. Abeyta gave the town a letter from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that states the land is no longer designated as a wetlands and does not meet the criteria to be designated as such.

“I’m against it, that’s about it,” said neighbor Wayne Martinez during the public comment section of the hearing.

The commission will consider the preliminary concept for the development again Jan. 3.