

# A new 'village' in Taos County

## Tarleton Ranch Eco-Village plans near completion

The Taos News · 6 Sep 2018 · By Cody Hooks [chooks@taosnews.com](mailto:chooks@taosnews.com) The Taos News

Glen Michael Tarleton, a third-generation Northern New Mexican, has been thinking for 25 years about how to develop a few hundred acres north of Taos into a “nice village,” a place where a person can walk from their home to get a bite to eat,

being able to provide (housing) for couples, old valley people, laborers, (people with) service jobs, as well as the better off people,” Tarleton said. The 94 commercial lots include space for workforce housing, rental housing and village center live-work units, according to Halley. He said their plan is based on actual housing and economic development needs identified by the county. “We weren’t just composing this out of thin air. We were

the developers were waiting for the county to add a new regulatory process to its land use regulations, or LURs.

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meet up for beers or shop for the staples.

In the past year, a team of developers have molded the village from an idea into a plan that’s nearly ready to take before the county for consideration.

The developers pitch the “Tarleton Ranch Eco-Village” as a solution to problems in the Taos area, especially a shortage of housing for working people but also a lack of amenities in the part of the county between the town and Taos Ski Valley. If approved and fully built, the project would include hundreds of new homes, its own plaza, spa, medical offices and senior living facility.

But neighbors who bought or built homes in the sage-covered land around the proposed village are starting to raise major concerns, from overbuilding commercial properties to a potentially unsustainable use of water.

‘Let’s do this right’

Over the last year, some of the specifics for the proposed Tarleton Ranch Eco-Village on State Road 150 have morphed through ongoing conversations between the developers and neighbors. But the essential idea has only become more salient.

“There’s a big need out here for a nice village,” said Tarleton. He envisions creating a community where people who live north of Taos can live and play in the same place and avoid going into town on the weekends for simple errands.

The plan for Tarleton Ranch is intended to be a road map for a development that could take four decades to fully build.

If everything comes to fruition, the 420-acre parcel on the west side of the highway between Gavilan Drive and Camino del Cielo would be a self-contained village with nearly 400 new homes, over 90 new commercial lots, including three hotels and a brewery, and a 160-acre farm that's laced with open spaces and walking trails.

The current iteration of the ranch is the brainchild of Tarleton, Mark Yaravitz, a longtime player in the local real estate market, and John Halley, owner of the permaculture-based development firm GaiaQuest.

The developers think a comprehensive master plan with approved locations for potential businesses is better than the alternative, "rural sprawl" with houses and random commercial enterprises — a dollar store, for example — turning the stretch of highway into a hodgepodge of buildings, driveways and parking lots.

That, said Yaravitz, would be "a ridiculous way to go. Let's do this right."

While Tarleton has created other subdivisions in the vicinity of the proposed project, this will be denser. Instead of a single house on a one or two-acre lot, this would have 10 residential lots per acre, all tied to a central water line from El Prado Water and Sanitation District.

"This is a very broad plan for being able to provide (housing) for couples, ski valley people, laborers, (people with) service jobs, as well as the better off people," Tarleton said. The 94 commercial lots include space for workforce housing, rental housing and village center livework units, according to Halley. He said their plan is based on actual housing and economic development needs identified by the county. "We weren't just composing this out of thin air. We were actually responsive to what has already been a collective consciousness for how you plan for the future," Halley said.

Yet Yaravitz acknowledged that, based on current housing trends in Taos County, half of the residences in the development would likely be second homes.

Always an intention

Though the scope of the project has caught some neighbors and other county residents off guard, Tarleton said it's "always been the intention to build it out" as an investment for the family.

Tarleton's grandmother was born in the Moreno Valley, and his father was a mechanic whose old shop is now the Taos Ale House, he said. Tarleton, 74, grew up across the street in the abandoned adobe that until 2014 housed the Dragonfly Bakery. In the early 1950s, the family moved to the then-isolated ranch in what is now Upper Las Colonias. Though his dad liked ranching more than working on trucks, he knew it has "never been a profitable business," Tarleton said.

Tarleton's story is akin to that of a lot of young Taoseños. After graduating from Taos Central High School, he left to Albuquerque, became an engineer and eventually moved back to Taos.

The extended family is largely based in Albuquerque and would like to see the land developed sooner rather than later, Tarleton said. Yaravitz joined the enterprise about five years ago, but it was only in the last year since Halley joined the team that "we're really getting serious," Tarleton said.

Halley gave the family a timeline to get the proposal through the design and approval process. They are now nearing the end of that proposed time frame, he said, and are trying to finish the design before

handing a detailed plan over to the county's planning department to kick off the next phase of the project.

### New zoning tools

Before submitting the plan, the developers were waiting for the county to add a new regulatory process to its land use regulations, or LURs.

Taos County is proposing to add planned unit developments, or PUDs, as a type of project developers can submit for approval. Generally, PUDs are proposals with a mix of housing (like singlefamily units, apartments and rentals), common space and commercial properties meant to address multiple community needs in one place.

The town of Taos already allows developers to submit PUD applications.

The Taos County Planning Commission approved the new version of the LURs at a previous meeting and the Taos County Board of Commissioners approved amendments to various sections of the regulations, except for two chapters regarding public comment, Sept. 4. Copies of the proposed LURs are available at the Taos Public Library, Taos County Clerk's Office, Taos County Planning Department or online at

Now that planned unit developments are part of the county's toolkit, the team intends to quickly submit its proposal.

Some neighbors have raised concerns that doing the project as a PUD locks the neighborhood into too strict of a map for growth. But the developers pivot toward "transparency," arguing this process "shows neighbors and everybody what we're trying to accomplish" upfront, rather than one piece at a time, Tarleton said.

The land within the proposal was zoned in 2003 when the county created its first "neighborhood overlay zone" in Upper Las Colonias. While the neighborhood association will eventually review the project, that board simply makes recommendations to the county.

"We are not the last word," said neighborhood association president Kurt Edelbrock.

The developers won't build out the village. It would be up to other developers to buy the land and build the clusters of houses, commercial properties and infrastructure: utility lines, water lines, roads and a sewage plant, Yarvitz explained.

Still, the project depends on the county's proposed new process. The developers confirmed that until planned unit developments are officially added to the land use regulations, funding for the water lines won't go through.

They would not disclose the potential investors in the eco-village. "Not going to mention it. Nobody from Taos," Halley said, but added they've talked with a hotelier and "folks involved with" senior living centers.

### Past Tarleton projects

While some of Tarleton family's developments became a reality, not all have.

In 2016, Tarleton proposed building a solar array off Valencia Road, near the western boundary of the Upper Las Colonias neighborhood. The array was meant to be part of the Kit Carson Electric Cooperative network of solar facilities that are critical to achieving a goal of 100 percent daytime solar energy use by 2022. The county approved the project at the time but it was never built.

Kit Carson teamed with Guzman Energy to build its solar network, which slashed what the co-op was willing to pay for energy from the Tarleton's proposed facility. The permits for the solar array expire next month.

Another Tarleton project, to build an apartment complex in downtown Taos, also stalled.

The Tarleton Apartments was a proposed 18-unit complex for the Paseo del Pueblo Norte property that was Tarleton's childhood home. The plan received an initial round of approval from the town's planning commission in early 2014.

Tarleton wanted to demolish both homes on the property to create more access, but because the property is in the historic overlay zone, the town demanded proof the nearly century-old homes couldn't be saved. The the parties went to court over the project and the town prevailed.

The town's planning department recently issued Tarleton an order to clean and secure the downtown Taos property because people were sleeping on the premises.

#### Neighbor concerns

Scuttlebutt about the Tarleton Ranch Eco-village has split neighbors into several camps.

Some of the more active residents in Upper Las Colonias have spent the last year meeting with the developers and working out compromises for certain elements of the project, such as locating the sewage plant near Tarleton's existing home instead of near the southern boundary of the project area. (Tarleton is a board member of the neighborhood association).

Other neighbors have started to organize amongst themselves to talk about the ins and outs of the project and the impacts to their land, lives and the environment.

Still other neighbors are opposed to the project and not simply because it would be in their backyards.

Ron Polichnowski said the water use of 400 new homes and nearly 100 new businesses is "the biggest concern" among his neighbors. Secondly is the increased traffic on State Road 150, already "one of the most dangerous roads in Taos County."

Lastly, he doesn't have faith in the project after watching the Tarleton Apartment proposal fall apart. Polichnowski is worried, he said, about the county approving this new village but everyone walking away from it, leaving the neighborhood to deal with the aftermath.