



THE TAOS NEWS

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Vigil tapped as planning director

By Patricia Chambers

The Taos News

Allen Vigil, a former planner for the town of Taos and for Taos County, will return as planning director for the town.

Vigil was notified of the council's decision following a March 27 executive session. One of 14 applicants for the post, Vigil replaces Lou Baker, who resigned from the town council in January 2007.

"I have been saying for the longest time that we have to engage all the agencies for the town and the county," Vigil said.

The protection of water supplies for the town and the region will need to be a top priority, he said. "A contaminated wellhead caused the problem with Alamosa's water," Vigil said.

Alamosa, Colo., is flushing its water system with chlorine after a salmonella contamination sickened about 300 people. "We also need to determine if we have developed a good inventory for the Taos Regional Water Plan, and be sure that the town is protecting private water rights and the rights of the acequias," Vigil added.

"I believe the town has to develop a plan to conserve water and energy. We have to work smarter," he said.

The planning director needs to keep the Town Council informed about changes in building trends and prepare for the future, he said. "I want to be accountable for what I am doing," Vigil said.

Building issues

The town of Taos needs to prepare for new technologies, new building trends and changes in the building trade codes, Vigil said.

The process for building permit approvals needs to be as efficient as possible and need to be flexible enough to address sustainability issues, he said.

“We can expect that LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) codes will be mandatory within the next 10 years,” Vigil said.

Builders and developers also need to be assured that the town will not bog down approvals of projects, Vigil said. “Time is money. The price of building materials is going up almost on a daily basis,” he said.

If a developer faces an unexpected delay of six to 18 months because of a minor design change, the project is likely to be stopped, Vigil said. “That eliminates construction jobs and the economy goes down. The developer’s economy translates into the local economy,” he said.

As planning director, Vigil said he will work to develop the proposed SmartCode, which would revise the town’s landuse regulations and manage future growth.

“The SmartCode has a lot of potential,” said Vigil who worked on the Vision 20/20 Plan in the late 1990s.

The plan developed with public input from throughout the area has been an unofficial guideline for planning decisions in Taos.

Since it was never officially enacted into law, however, the Vision 20/20 Plan’s variation from the town Land Use Development Code (LUDC) has caused continued controversy.

The Town Council replaced the entire Planning and Zoning Commission, as well as the members of its accompanying Historic Preservation Commission, last year after the council determined that zoning decisions were not being made on the LUDC regulations. The commission members said they were following the Vision 20/20 recommendations.

The Town Council hired PlaceMakers, an Albuquerque planning consultant to develop the SmartCode to reconcile the differences between existing regulations and Vision

The council is currently working on a plan to test the SmartCode concept on the Chamisa Verde subdivision, the town’s affordable housing project.

“I’m looking forward to working with the SmartCode at Chamisa Verde,” Vigil said. “I think it’s an excellent way to test it.”

Other areas of focus

Another area of focus for the planning director is the Taos County Growth Management Plan. County commissioners have been working on the management plan since the Extra Territorial Zone (ETZ) regulating an area at the town’s borders by a board made up of members representing both the town and county was devolved about two years ago.

Vigil said he is familiar with both county and town planning issues. Vigil worked as the town planner until 2000 and worked as a private practice engineer for about two years before joining the county.

The water and sewer sanitation district in the former ETZ area need to be included in discussions about development in the area, along with the school district, Kit Carson Electric Cooperative and the Soil and Water Conservation districts, Vigil said.

The last item on Vigil priority list is working with the staff of the town planning department, which has worked without a director for the past 14 months.

“They haven’t had a director in a long time and they need to know what is expected of them and we may need to work on customer service,” Vigil said. “We have to identify initiatives and complete projects, such as the inventory of the historic district,” he added.

Vigil retired as the planner for Taos County in 2005 and later struggled with colon cancer and is now completely recovered. The doctors have given him a clean bill of health.

“I’m doing great,” Vigil said.

He expects to begin work within a week or two. “They have to get through the paperwork and the background check and I had to take a physical,” Vigil said.

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