



THE TAOS NEWS

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County mulls moratorium on subdivisions, developments

Commissioner Nick Jaramillo said the county needs to be proactive in protecting the area and not ‘turn a blind eye’ to development.

By Matthew van Buren

The Taos News

Taos County is considering a three-year moratorium on subdivisions, major developments and other divisions of land in southern portions of the county.

The Taos County Commission discussed the proposed ordinance at a special meeting May 27. However, the commission postponed a vote on publishing notice of a public hearing regarding the moratorium, asking for further information from the county administrators.

The proposed moratorium follows the commission's denial last year of the preliminary plat of a subdivision in the Miranda Canyon Preserve; many of the commission's concerns centered on the availability of water and the potential effects of drilling wells on the geologically complex site could have.

Last September, representatives from the state Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources told the commission more study of the area would be necessary before the county could make informed decisions about its hydrology, especially considering fault systems under the surface.

The moratorium would affect areas of Ranchos de Taos, Llano Quemado, Los Córdovas, Cordillera, Tierra Blanca, Talpa and the Taos Overlook area to the Rio Grande River Corridor. As it was presented to the commission May 27, it would limit certain land divisions, major developments, multiple-family developments and commercial uses within the proposed boundaries.

The three-year moratorium is meant to give the county an opportunity to study the area's hydrogeology further.

"There is a high risk that future large-scale development could severely impact the availability of water resources in the area," County Manager Adam Baker said. "We don't have enough scientific knowledge on which we can base accurate predictions."

Baker compared allowing certain developments in the area to playing "Russian roulette." He said the proposed ordinance balances the need to protect the area with the ability of families to develop single lots.

At the May 27 meeting, Commissioner Dan Barrone said he had "some problems with the whole thing." He said he wanted to look more closely at how the proposed boundaries were drawn and make sure the county doesn't infringe on landowners' (particularly small landowners') rights.

"This body has every right to limit the use of land if it's for the public welfare," county attorney Jacob Caldwell said. "I don't detect a huge issue in terms of takings."

Commissioner Nick Jaramillo said the county needs to be proactive in protecting the area and not "turn a blind eye" to development.

Following the commission's postponement of a vote, Baker said the administration would better explain the boundaries and clarify certain language in the proposed ordinance. The vote to publicize the proposed moratorium should be before the commission again Tuesday (June 8), with a public hearing to follow on

another date before the ordinance is enacted or denied.

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