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## County plans changes to land-use regs by Jan. 1

By Matthew van Buren

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Taos County's land-use regulations are getting closer to adoption after a four-yearlong overhaul.

The Taos County Commission discussed the revised regulations, focusing on its 27 additions, at an Aug. 10 work study. After further administrative and legal review, the regulations will be subject to public inspection and further public hearings.

"The whole document has gone through quite a change," interim Chief Planner Nathan Sánchez told the commission.

One new provision would create a "board of adjustment" for the county. With more standards for approval written into the proposed regulations, more cases would be handled administratively; Sánchez said the board of adjustment would primarily hear variances and appeals of the planning director's decisions.

"It helps to move the application along," he said.

County Manager Adam Baker said the planning director has more authority under the new regulations, and new neighborhood zoning is also intended to smooth and expedite the administrative process.

"We want the planning commission focusing on the bigger projects," Baker said.

Among other additions is language disallowing "*ex parte* communications" between members of decision-making bodies and applicants whose projects will be before them; the regulations call for any attempts at communications outside the official proceedings to be documented for the record. Baker said *ex parte* communication happens, however inappropriate, and adding the section dealing with it should help.

"By doing so, you're only hurting your own case," he said.

However, Commissioners Nick Jaramillo and Andrew Chávez didn't think the language was strong enough; they asked the administration to look into penalizing those who attempt to improperly influence hearings' outcomes.

Neighborhood zoning is also included in the proposed regulations. The county has been discussing neighborhood zoning for quite some time, with a draft plan for seven neighborhoods (Cañon, Hondo Mesa, Las Colonias West Mesa, Latir/Versylvia, Lower Des Montes, Ranchos de Taos and Taos Canyon) having been ready last August. The plans detail the allowed uses in zoned areas, permitting administrative review of conforming uses.

Ranchos de Taos Neighborhood Association President David Maes said the process has been going on too long without being implemented.

"It's been a year," he told the commission. "There is a great deal of frustration and impatience."

Deputy county manager and acting planning director Rick Bellis said the new regulations will go before the neighborhood associations at meetings beginning next month, then they will likely be the subject of public hearings in October and November. He said the county will be working with contractors, real estate agents and others who will be affected by the new regulations and need more technical information than the general public.

The new regulations should be complete and implemented by Jan. 1.

“We seem pretty committed to that calendar at this point,” Bellis said.