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Land use code hitting home stretch

'If we have some little doubts, let's get those doubts out of the way before we move forward.'

Nick Jaramillo
J.R. Logan
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The Taos County Planning Department is finalizing language in its new land use code, and a tentative timeline has the Taos County Commission adopting the code Nov. 9.

But several steps remain before the code can be implemented.

County Manager Adam Baker said the county had set an ambitious schedule for putting the code into use, and some tasks have already been pushed back to provide more breathing room in the timetable.

"We still plan to implement the land use regulations by Jan. 1," Baker said.

A work study session Tuesday (Aug. 31) attended by commissioners, planning staff, the county manager and county legal staff continued a review of the language contained in the 235-page document.

Interim Chief Planner Nathan Sánchez said this would likely be the last time the commissioners would see the land use code before a final draft is compiled.

Sánchez said members of the land use steering committee, which spent more than three years on three previous drafts, would offer their opinions on the document in the next week.

The code will also incorporate independent zoning regulations for seven neighborhoods (Ca-òn, Hondo Mesa, Las Colonias West Mesa, Latir/ Versylvia, Lower Des Montes, Ranchos de Taos and Taos Canyon).

According to the tentative schedule, a final draft will be available to the general public by Oct. 15.

The county has not yet opened the new land use regulations to public scrutiny, and Planning Department staff say they will then organize community meetings across Taos County to collect additional comments from residents.

The appointment of a board of adjustment is also on the county's to-do list and must be done before the new code can go into effect.

The board of adjustment is a new, five-member body created by the revised land use regulations. The board would hear, review and approve variances, and rule on appeals to decisions made by the planning director.

At the work study session, Baker recommended that board of adjustment applicants submit a letter of interest, including any relevant qualifications.

A sticking point during the work study session was a 90-day feedback period that would allow the county to make slight tweaks to the code immediately after it goes into effect.

Deputy County Manager and temporary Planning Director Richard Bellis said the feedback period was customary for a document of this size and would give the county a chance to work out any technical glitches or procedures.

“This is not meant to be a static document that is set in stone,” Bellis said.

Baker also appealed to the commissioners, arguing that a feedback period would give the county a chance to avoid unforeseen difficulties.

“It can be very difficult to anticipate everything that can arise,” Baker said. “We hope you will give us some flexibility in the first few months.”

But Commissioner Nick Jaramillo questioned the need for a trial period after years spent gathering input from various committees and neighborhood representatives.

“There’s been enough time in there,” Jaramillo said. “If we have some little doubts, let’s get those doubts out of the way before we move forward.”