

## **My Turn**

### **County needs an efficient, user-friendly land use code**

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Since the early 1980s there have been attempts at developing Land Use Regulations to manage growth in our community.

Comprehensive planning and management have been under way since 1993. In 1995, due to tremendous public opposition to a proposed countywide zoning ordinance, the commissioners decided to include more public input.

The intent of this new approach was to discourage political jockeying and encourage increased community involvement.

By September 1995, Taos County Planning Department launched a program to develop and empower neighborhood associations that would help guide the land use process.

To this end, neighborhood associations developed vision statements, goals, objectives, and an action plan, which was eventually to be used to create neighborhood or community zoning plans.

In 1997, Taos County approved a comprehensive plan that included neighborhood vision statements developed by 24 neighborhood associations.

To date only two neighborhood associations (Upper Las Colonias and Stagecoach) have created zoning plans that were formally adopted by Taos County.

In 2005/2006 Taos County embarked on the first of what was to be three phases of the Taos County Growth Management Plan. A consulting firm was hired to work with local citizens and county staff to develop this plan. Phase I was completed, and commissioners adopted it March 2007. Phase II has been about the neighborhood associations creating their own land use plans. Upper Las Colonias and Stagecoach neighborhood associations also worked to revise their plans to be incorporated into the Taos County Land Use Regulations.

Concurrently, a task force of citizens, appointed by county, spent over three years reviewing and making recommendations for revisions to the County Land Use Regulations. Their draft was presented to commissioners in August 2009.

Also, seven neighborhood plans were presented to the county commissioners in August 2009. Countless hours went into the development of neighborhood plans and every effort possible was made to include all citizens in the process. All seven neighborhoods chose to employ overlay zoning to achieve visions for their communities.

Preservation of the land and the rich traditions of the various cultures have been in the forefront of the planning. Wise and managed development will help maintain our values, while allowing for growth.

Neighborhood associations are concerned about planning for the whole county as well as their individual neighborhoods. Meanwhile the county undertook an overhaul of its existing land use regulations incorporating the suggestions of the task force and also include the seven neighborhood plans.

Combined, this constitutes the County Comprehensive Land Use Code now being considered for passage.

So finally, in 2011, the neighborhood associations are closer to achieving the goal set out in 1995 by commissioners to allow neighborhood associations to choose an approach to land use planning that would reflect the visions of individual neighborhoods. Other neighborhood associations are working on plans, which, when completed and approved, will become part of the County Comprehensive Land Use Regulations.

Collaboration between the neighborhood associations and the county has resulted in a more functional and effective working relationship with the Planning Department. We can honestly report the process of developing our plans has been inclusive and transparent every step of the way. It is also important to note this is a living document and fine-tuning will be ongoing.

Taos County needs a more efficient, more user-friendly land use code. That is what is being proposed.

While progress has been made over the years, the lack of a clear path both toward development and protection has left our county with little guidance and significant chaos when property/land owners attempt to develop or use their land.

The time, expense, and lack of consistency in decision-making is harming our community; in these troubling economic times we must move forward.

We have a new draft Land Use Code that will promote and support a collective vision for managing growth as well as increasing economic opportunities.

We want to encourage all neighborhood associations to contact their commissioners and to attend the Sept. 20 Taos County Commission meeting.

We respectfully request that the Commissioners vote to set a public hearing date and move land use planning forward.

*Linda Moscarella is the president of Lower Des Montes Neighborhood Association; Barbara J. Sheppard is president of Las Colonias West-Mesa Preservation (Neighborhood) Association.*

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