

Another try for county land code regulations

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After several stops and starts, the Taos County Commission will once again consider adopting a major overhaul to its land use code.

The latest timeline for adoption is as follows:

- New final draft to be ready Nov. 15;
- County commission vote to publish notice of adoption Nov. 22;
- Public hearing on ordinance and possible vote to adopt Jan. 24.

The new regulations will not go into effect until after the commission holds a public hearing and votes to accept the code.

The county has been working on new land-use regulations since 2006. A year ago, the county hoped to approve a draft of the code and have it in place by January 2011.

But the process was delayed several times after commissioners expressed concerns and insisted on going through the code line by line at several work-study sessions. The code then underwent legal review for several months.

In July, the county unveiled what it then called the final draft — a 222-page document that included general regulations as well as zoning “overlays” prepared by several area neighborhood associations.

Once released, the regulations were criticized by many who said they were left out of the planning process and didn’t have a chance to voice their opinions. County officials and neighborhood associations countered that they had held public meetings for years to develop the code.

Recently, commissioners have suggested that the code be adopted in phases. Commissioner Andrew Chávez said he would like to see the county pass the generic regulations, then consider each neighborhood overlay one-by-one.

Many neighborhood associations have expressed frustration that the county appears unwilling to implement the plans they’ve spent years preparing.

Questions about a specific zoning classification — irrigated agricultural — also led to some controversy this summer after the code was made public. The zone limits, drawn by individual neighborhood associations, limit development around waterways.

Those who support the irrigated agricultural zone say it preserves open space, and agrarian tradition and culture while allowing for limited development. But some, including the Taos County Association of Realtors, claimed the zone was a “taking” and would lead to declining property values. There were also concerns that the zone would complicate tax credits related to conservation easements.

Though the latest final draft has not yet been released, county officials have suggested that the irrigated agricultural zone will be cut from the new code.