

## County land use code inches toward vote

By J.R. Logan

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After nearly a decade of work, an overhaul of the county's land use regulations will likely be up for a vote early next year.

The latest "final draft" of the Taos County Land Use Code was released two weeks ago, and the county commission voted Nov. 22 to consider adoption of the code. At the moment, a public hearing and possible commission vote on whether to adopt the code is set for Jan. 24 and 25.

It is the farthest the code has gotten since work began on drafting new regulations in 2003. For years, the new land use code has been plagued by a number of false starts and rewrites, leaving some with the impression that nothing would ever materialize. But with the prospect of the new code actually becoming law, county officials expect more residents to speak up in the coming weeks.

In essence, the new code is meant to tighten up the administrative process and vague language in the existing land use rules so applications for development are handled more efficiently and fairly. The code also includes zoning maps created by individual neighborhood associations that address land use and lot size.

Portions of the code that led to controversy earlier this year (such as the "irrigated agricultural" zone, which limited development in small areas of the county) are absent from the most recent draft. Some, including the Taos County Association of Realtors, labeled the zone a "taking" because they argued it would lead to decreased property values and prevent landowners from developing their land.

Deputy county manager and planning director Richard Bellis told *The Taos News* that the latest land use draft was "a compromise" that will likely have a better chance of being approved.

County manager Jacob Caldwell has said the questions of how to preserve agricultural land and open space could be addressed by a separate ordinance in the future. Before a vote takes place in January, the county plans to once again go on tour for a series of public information meetings on the code. This time, Bellis said county staff will travel to outlying places such as Pilar and Tres Piedras in the hopes of spreading word of the new code and answering questions or concerns.

Bellis said about 22,000 letters will also be sent out to Taos County property owners notifying them of the proposed regulations.

Official comment forms have also been prepared to collect questions and concerns from the public. Forms are available online at [www.taoscounty.org](http://www.taoscounty.org).

Those with questions can call (575) 737-6440 with questions or comments.

Physical copies of the code will be made available at the county's administrative offices, and at community centers around the area. The code, as well as a schedule of public hearings and comment forms, can be found at <http://www.taosnews.com/>. The current draft of the land use code can be downloaded from [www.taoscounty.org](http://www.taoscounty.org).

Comments can be sent to [planningdepartment@taoscounty.org](mailto:planningdepartment@taoscounty.org).