

Dear Santa Fe County residents,

In the following message I will touch on some of the more interesting topics at our last meeting of the Board of County Commissioners.

I will also give you information about the next series of community meetings on the draft of the new Sustainable Land Development Code (SLDC). This coming series will be the most interesting, I think, since it will focus on the issue of zoning. As I have mentioned previously, we don't currently have real zoning in Santa Fe County. We do have density restrictions (based on geohydrologic zones), but we don't have zones in the sense of defining what kinds of uses are allowed in a given zone. This will all change in the new code, and it is one of the major changes. So I would really urge you to attend one of the public meetings held in an area near where you live. I think that there will be zoning maps (so that you can see where your house is), and there will be use tables. The tables will give you an idea of what kinds of developments could be done in your neighborhood.

Please feel free to pass this message around and to send me feedback and comments.

Sincerely,
-Kathy

Emergency Preparedness Grant:

Santa Fe County received a grant for emergency preparedness from the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. There is a balance of \$34,971 left of the grant monies, and this will be used to purchase a Public Warning System and mobile generators to power the system. This will be a mobile apparatus that will allow our emergency response personnel to be able to warn neighborhoods by broadcasting messages through a PA system.

Santa Fe River Greenway:

Since 1998 the County Open Space and Trails Program staff have been working to acquire land along the Santa Fe River with the ultimate goal of creating a public greenway which will include a trail system and a series of parks. The greenway will stretch from the current City limits near Frenchy's Field to the Wastewater Treatment Plant on the west side of NM 599. The work will also include restoring the river to a healthier and more natural state. This project will be of huge benefit to our community in so many different ways -- from improving our quality of life to providing wonderful spaces for our children to be outdoors.

In order to move forward with this project, the County needs to acquire easements or purchase rights of way from 46 private property owners. As you can imagine, that will be quite a time-consuming undertaking. We do not have a huge staff in the Open Space and Trails Program, so we are faced with a dilemma. Either our staff will do nothing but this project for the next several years, or we in the community will have to wait many years for the completion of the project.

With this in mind, the BCC unanimously approved a Professional Services Agreement to Tierra Right of Way Services, Ltd. for right-of-way acquisition services. This will include all such services that are required for obtaining either rights of way or easements. For example, the company will do such tasks as getting appraisals, providing appraisal reviews and environmental assessments, conducting negotiations with property owners, and overseeing closing services for right-of-way acquisitions or easements.

The cost of these services is not to exceed \$496,969. The funding for this Agreement will be from bond funding that was approved for Open Space acquisitions by voters in the past. And, fortunately, we do have resources available for the Open Space and Trails Program, although they can only be used for capital improvements or acquisitions. In fact, the County has quite a bit more funding available than the capability to actually make use of it at this time, due to limited staff. So it makes sense to use the monies for help in completing projects that have been approved.

The BCC also awarded a contract to Design Enquity in the amount of \$381,491 to complete conceptual designs for the river channel reconstruction and for a multi-use trail along those sections of the river that do not currently have trails. Construction of the greenway between the San Ysidro Crossing and Caja del Oro Grant Road has already been completed, and the section between the Camino Carlos Rael crossing and Siler Road is undergoing final design. But the conceptual designs for the river channel reconstruction and the multi-use trail for the other sections are needed before it is determined which properties (or easements) need to be acquired.

We are very fortunate to have this Greenway in our community. And a healthier river will benefit both the people in our community as well as the plants and animals.

Road Acceptance Process:

Currently, Santa Fe County maintains 574 miles of roads. The number of miles fluctuates from year to year as the County adopts new roads for maintenance, abandons roads, or road ownership changes due to annexation. For example, in 1963 the County maintained 815 miles of roads, but that number then decreased to 432 miles in 1988 due to annexations by municipalities. After that time the number of miles gradually increased over the years to its current value of 574 miles.

The County receives many requests to adopt roads for County maintenance every year. However, during my tenure we have adopted very few. The policy for adopting roads is currently embodied in a resolution written in 1998. This is somewhat out-of-date, so several Commissioners have been championing the effort of updating the policy.

At the same time, the State of New Mexico has a Statute that also allows Counties to abandon or vacate roads, but the BCC has never passed a resolution that sets policy for this procedure.

At our last meeting, staff presented a proposed resolution that updates our current road acceptance policy and also implements a road abandonment policy. (However, this item at the meeting was for discussion only.)

The major differences in the proposed new policy from the existing policy are as follows:

1) A new designation of road is created, called Lessor County Maintenance. Under this designation, a road (or a portion of a road) can be accepted for a limited suite of maintenance activities. What is currently envisioned for a Lessor County Maintained road is that it would be graded twice a year, and some amount of drainage work would be performed. However, there would be no snow removal services for these roads.

2) The process for acceptance in this resolution includes a more detailed list of criteria in order for it to be completely clear to a community as to just what is required for a road to be accepted.

3) A process for road abandonment is also created.

4) The Road Advisory Committee is specifically included in the process of determining which roads to accept or abandon.

The Road Advisory Committee reviewed the resolution that sets out the road acceptance and road abandonment processes. They unanimously recommended approval. The BCC will consider this resolution at the upcoming meeting on October 9th.

Adoption of Rural Water Systems:

The BCC adopted a resolution in April setting out a policy for the County to adopt rural water systems. However, it was quite abbreviated and did not spell out exact processes and procedures. In fact, it was a sort of emergency resolution so that the County could adopt the Upper Cañoncito Water System in order to use County funds to help the system upgrade its infrastructure.

Upon reflection, staff felt (rightly so) that exact procedures and the requirements for both the County as well as the local private water system should be articulated. So staff brought forth a new resolution that is much more specific.

I will not go into details as it was quite lengthy. If you would like to see a copy, please let me know.

But there was one important part of the policy that I would like to discuss briefly. The policy in the resolution requires that if a private water system is to be helped financially by the County, then that water system must be adopted into the County water utility. The reason that staff strongly recommends this is that if the County is to commit the taxpayers' resources, then the County should have control over the improvements in that system. I agree with this philosophy. In the past, some water systems have been real sinks for funding coming from either the state or the local government. Not infrequently it seems that the problems never get solved, yet more funding is requested year after year. So our staff would like to have oversight in the case that County funding is going to any system.

This provision was a sticking point with Commissioner Anaya in particular. So the BCC tabled the resolution for continuing discussion.

The County still does have the original resolution in place, and using that policy, we voted unanimously to adopt the Cañoncito Mutual Domestic into the County water utility.

Public Meetings on the SLDC:

Series 3: Zoning and Standards

All meetings are from 4 p.m. – 8 p.m., but the main presentation will be at 6:00 p.m.

Pojoaque Satellite Office (in the Pojoaque Pueblo Plaza)
5 West Gutierrez, Suite 9
Wednesday, October 10

Nancy Rodriguez Center
1 Prairie Dog Loop
Thursday October 11

Galisteo Community Center (next to the Galisteo Fire Station)
39 Avenida Vieja
Tuesday, October 16

Edgewood Senior Center
114 Quail Trail
Thursday, October 18

For more information on open houses or obtaining a copy of the SLDC visit www.santafecountynm.gov/sldc or contact Melissa Holmes (505) 995-2717 or msholmes@santafecountynm.gov.

-Kathy Holian
Santa Fe County Commissioner, District 4
Office: 505-986-6205

Email: kholian@santafecounty.org
(or Kathleen.Holian@comcast.net)