

Dear Santa Fe County residents:

Our last meeting of the Board of County Commissioners -- an administrative meeting -- was chock full. We were in meetings from 9:00 in the morning until 8:30 at night, almost a 12-hour day. Several of the issues took quite a while to discuss. One of those issues was the new Galisteo Community Plan. I will not elaborate on the plan below, but I would like to say that this is truly an impressive achievement. I would like to encourage communities that don't have plans to look at this one as a beautiful example of how planning should be done. This was the result of the hard work of many people in Galisteo over the course of several years. The Plan is an important step forward for the community, but the process of developing it was also important. It has the effect of bringing a community together to decide what is important and what they would like to preserve.

At the meeting, there was some major rearranging of the agenda due to the fact that Commissioner Anaya is taking classes on Tuesday evenings in Albuquerque. I want to assure you that we will try to accommodate his schedule as best as we can without compromising the public's ability to attend for public hearing parts of the meetings after work.

Please let me know if you have comments or suggestions on any of the issues below, and please feel free to forward this message.

Sincerely,
-Kathy

Data Collection for Property Tax Assessments:

The Assessor's Office requested the authority to spend roughly \$1.955 million for services to help with data collection on all residential properties in Santa Fe County. (This would include properties within City limits as well.) Of this amount, \$500,000 would come from County Cash Reserves. The remainder would be from the Assessor's Valuation Fund that can be used for services and other items needed to help the Assessor's Office do what they are charged to do. (This Fund comes from a small percentage of the property tax that is collected in the County.)

I want to emphasize that the purpose of this project is accurate data collection. It is not a total reassessment of properties. However, properties that have added improvements over what is on the tax assessor's database will show an increase in value.

The reason that the Assessor's Office is contracting with an outside firm (Tyler Technologies) is that only 36% of properties listed in the database have been recently verified for accuracy. (In fact, there are roughly 55,000 properties that have not been updated for many a year.) The Assessor feels that it would literally take years with the existing staff to bring all the properties up to date. It is better to treat all properties equally in the County. By hiring this company, the project can be completed by the end of the calendar year.

This project will include:

- An on-site visit and inspection of exterior of all improvements and out-buildings,
- Collection of all pertinent data not presently recorded in the database,
- Photographing exterior (street view) of all properties,
- Interviewing property owners as necessary, and

- Providing all data to Assessor's Office in digital format for inclusion in the Computer-Assisted Mass Appraisal (CAMA) database.

Since there will be site visits for this project, the contractors who will be doing the work will be wearing special vests to identify them as well as carrying identification. Also, if they need access to a home that is fenced and behind a gate, they will contact the homeowners before coming out. Every effort will be made to respect the privacy of the residents while being able to actually accomplish the task.

I really believe this is an issue of fairness and accuracy. It brings homeowners into compliance who have not reported additions and major improvements. It is also important to do the whole County at once, rather than just one area per year if this is to be a fair exercise.

This could actually *lower* the tax *rate* across the County. Because of yield control (which keeps the overall total of collected property tax roughly the same from one year to the next), an increase in the tax base could actually *reduce* the rate everybody is paying.

One other advantage of this is that the GIS coordinates of the front door of each property will be entered into the computer system. This can result in quicker response of emergency personnel to a call for help.

Just for your information, this item passed by a 3-2 vote, with Commissioners Anaya and Mayfield opposed. Commissioner Anaya said that -- rather than spending the extra money to bring all properties into fair compliance in a single year -- he preferred that our existing Assessor's staff accomplish this task, one area at a time, which would effectively extend the equalization process out over the next several years.

Teen Court:

Alice Sealy, the Director of Teen Court, gave a presentation about this very successful program that is run and sponsored by the County.

Teen Court is an alternative court for misdemeanor offenses by teenagers who are referred by Municipal Court, Juvenile Probation and Parole, Magistrate Court, Children's Court, or the Santa Fe Public Schools. The types of offenses that are eligible to be considered are, for example, traffic violations, shoplifting (less than \$250), possession of marijuana or alcohol, and disorderly conduct.

At Teen Court, the teenagers are judged and sentenced by a teen jury. In addition, teens serve as attorneys that both prosecute and defend the cases. However, the idea is not to determine guilt or innocence, but rather the sentence for the teen who has committed the infraction. The teens who are being sentenced must accept complete responsibility before their cases can even be heard. This is also a way for eligible teens to keep their record clean. If a teen successfully completes his or her sentence, then the charges and/or possible fines are dismissed.

Sentencing options include such things as attending a substance abuse program, defensive driving class, the Strategies for Teen Anger Management Program, or other programs or classes that are relevant to the infraction. In addition, the teens are often required to write letters of apology to their parents or to the victims of their bad behavior. The teens may also be required to do certain kinds of relevant community service, like helping with graffiti clean-up.

I am very proud of what has been accomplished with this great program for teenagers in our County. Being sentenced in a court of their peers has a profound effect on teen behavior. The recidivism rate is very low, something like 15%. In addition, the overall cost of the program is low. Members of our community volunteer to be judges, so the main cost has to do with the staff that run the program.

And I am sorry to have to report that Alice Sealy is retiring, although she has offered to come back to help out in whatever way she can.

Procurement Policies:

Our County Attorney brought forward a new ordinance that deals with procurement policies. This proposed ordinance replaces an emergency ordinance that was passed in 2010. It "reforms the County's procurement practices with respect to road and building construction projects to ensure that the public trust is maintained, that projects are properly designed and constructed and completed within budget, and that projects are contracted after a fair and transparent procurement process."

Here are the major points of this ordinance:

- No contract that has a total value greater than \$250,000 will be awarded without competitive bidding.
- Any multi-year contract shall be written initially for a one-year term with annual renewal at the County's option.
- All construction projects above \$100,000 (except for those funded by the Legislature) shall be included in the County Capital Improvement Plan before being constructed.
- Road maintenance shall only be performed on a County-maintained road, and all road maintenance work shall be placed on a list recommended by the Road Advisory Committee, developed by staff, and approved by the Commission.
- Any construction project costing more than \$250,000 must have plans and specifications drawn by a licensed professional engineer in the State of New Mexico.
- All requests for maintenance, repair, construction, or reconstruction of a road or facility should be made through the County's internet web site or through a Constituent Services Liaison.
- The Finance Division must periodically review and audit procurement files for those projects greater than \$250,000 in value.
- Persons responsible for procurement, persons with authority to sign requisitions, and persons otherwise authorized to approve expenditures must be the most responsible, experienced, and capable employees.
- Employees and members of the public are encouraged to report confidentially (but not anonymously) any potential wrongdoing or other concern relating to a construction project or any fraud, abuse, illegal, or unlawful activity within the County government.

The above list is not totally comprehensive, but it gives you the idea of what is included in the ordinance. There will also be a companion resolution that will further clarify procedures for procurement.

The Commission voted unanimously to publish title and general summary of the ordinance. It will be discussed in detail (and the public will be able to make comments) at our BCC meeting at the end of March.

Close-Out of Construction Budget for Buckman Direct Diversion Project:

The Buckman Direct Diversion (BDD) Project has now finished construction. The City and County have approved a mutual release of the final allocation from each entity for the construction. (This does not include continuing operating expenditures.)

There was some disagreement between the City and County on two issues. One was how much the City was entitled to as the Project Manager of the construction. The other area of disagreement had to do with how much credit each entity could claim from various grants and other State and Federal assistance that the project received.

The Mutual Release resolved these issues. The County and City agreed that the City's fee for its fiscal services as project manager should be \$2.1 million, which is 1% of the total project cost. There was also agreement that credit for any grants should be shared equally by the City and the County.

The upshot of this agreement was that the County had overpaid toward construction by an amount of \$550,848. Rather than getting a check for that amount, the County decided to roll it over into a capital "carveout" contingency fund. These monies can be used for any items related to the construction that come up unexpectedly in the future.

I really want to give a great deal of credit to our County Manager and our County Attorney for being on top of this issue and looking out for the County's interests. If we had just taken the City's word for what the close-out budget should be, we would have ended up paying more money, rather than getting a credit.

Equipment for Eldorado Fire District:

The Fire Department will be purchasing a new Pumper Fire Apparatus for the Eldorado Fire District. This was identified as an important need in the Fire Department's 2010-2014 Five-Year Plan.

The design of the fire truck was carefully developed by the Department's Apparatus Specifications Committee. Volunteer and Career members of the committee spent many hours conducting research and designing a vehicle that is safe, durable, cost effective, and provides consistency with the existing fleet. It is intended that this vehicle will meet the needs of the Santa Fe County Fire Department for many years to come.

Interestingly, the Public Regulatory Commission had to give approval for this purchase prior to the BCC considering this item. The BCC then had to approve the purchase because the total cost (\$344,190) is greater than the \$100,000 threshold for purchases that can occur solely on the authority of the Fire Department.

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P.S. Here is another item of information related to property tax and the Assessor's office:

County Assessor Accepting Annual Application for Valuation Freezes:

Certain Santa Fe County property owners who occupy single-family dwellings may be eligible to freeze their taxable value as determined by the Santa Fe County Assessor's Office. Freezing the property valuation will minimize future tax obligations for those who qualify.

The valuation freeze is available to property owners age 65 or older or those who are considered permanently disabled. All applicants must meet the income requirement. In order to meet the income requirement an applicant's total household modified gross income in 2011 could not exceed \$32,000. Modified gross income is defined as all income from all sources undiminished by losses.

To qualify for the valuation freeze, you must apply annually no later than 30 days after the official date of mailing of the Santa Fe County Assessor's Official Notice of Value. This year's notices will be mailed March 12, 2012.

Supporting documentation required when attempting to qualify by age and income includes a completed application, proof of income (a copy of the property owner's 2011 New Mexico income tax return, and a copy of the property owner's 2011 federal income tax return), and proof of age (a valid New Mexico driver's license or birth certificate).

Supporting documentation required when attempting to qualify due to disability and income include a completed application, proof of income (a copy of the 2011 New Mexico income tax return, and a copy of the property owner's 2011 federal income tax return), and an award letter from either Social Security or Workers' Compensation confirming the permanent disability.

Applications are available at the Santa Fe County Assessor's Office at 102 Grant Ave., Santa Fe. Residents with Internet access may also download an application from www.santafecounty.org/assessor/downloadable_forms<http://www.santafecounty.org/assessor/downloadable_forms>.