

The Commissioners of Rio Grande County are attempting in a small way to provide you the public with more information of the goings on with your County. We are attempting to do this at least once a month if not more often.

The last few weeks have been very busy for the Commissioners. The first week of December, we attended the CCI annual conference in Colorado Springs. CCI is Colorado Counties Incorporated, a group formed over 100 years ago by the counties of Colorado to present a strong voice to the State legislature on issues concerning our counties. CCI has several steering committees that meet on a rotating basis in Denver during the legislative session to keep apprised of the progress of bills in the legislature.

Here is a list of the steering committees:

- Tourism, Resort and Economic Development
- General Government
- Taxation and Finance
- Transportation and Telecommunications
- Public lands
- Agriculture, Wildlife and Rural Affairs
- Land Use and Natural Resources
- Health and Human Service

At least one or more of the commissioners attend these steering committee meetings. Commissioner Davie is currently serving as vice- chair of the agriculture, wildlife and rural affairs committee for CCI, and should move into the chairmanship in January. Rio Grande County has presented several issues to CCI each year and works with the other counties to support good legislation at the State level and even the national level through NACO, which is the National Association of Counties. One issue we will raise this coming January is about the EPA and the flatulent tax on cattle, dairy cattle and pigs and also crops including potatoes that is being proposed. Our ranchers cannot afford to pay the Federal Government the proposed \$80.00 per head for cows and \$150 dollars per head on dairy cattle for the flatulent tax. They will all go out of business. If a rancher has 200 cows that cost is \$16,000.00 per year and if they cows all have a calf that cost doubles to \$32,000.00 per year. No rancher can afford that. So everyone needs to contact their Senator and Congressman to stop this nonsense.

The commissioners attended several very informational sessions at the CCI annual conference. One was on oil and gas regulations, another on the nursing services and new laws that were enacted this last legislative session and how we must have a plan in place as the board of health by July 2009, set our priorities and explain what we can fund out of those and try to match our local priorities with the State plan. We heard the state transportation director, Russell George, talking of where we go from here for CDOT and road repair and construction, how these infrastructure needs can be met.

The commissioners attended the San Luis Valley County Commissioners (SLVCC) meeting on Monday December 8th. Items of discussion included the budget for the coming year for the District Attorney elect Mr. Mahoney. The SLV County Commissioners have been very frustrated in not receiving financial statements from the current District Attorney and because we are required to fund the Office, wish to see where the money is being spent and workloads for attorneys. Mr. Comar has not responded to the requests from the SLVCC which then puts Mr. Mahoney in a bad position with a transition into office. The DA elect and the commissioners agreed to start the budget through June 2009 and then review expenditures of the past administration and move forward to prosecute criminals. The county commissions may have to amend budgets next year to make it work for all concerned.

Speaking of budgets, the commissioners approved next year's county budget in their meeting on December 10, 2008. A more complete explanation of the new budget will be presented shortly. The commissioners are concerned about the economy and where we need to be to maintain our current good financial status.

Lastly in this issue, the concern of oil and gas regulation keeps coming up. The commissioners are concerned as well and have extended the moratorium on oil and gas drilling until the State of Colorado has released their regulations and have been reviewed by the County with time to revise the existing County regulations.

The process for getting new regulations in place takes LOTS OF TIME, and we all wish they were done at the snap of a finger. The process for Rio Grande County and most other counties as well includes a long process so that anyone and everyone can have input into what they see as a need for our county. This means that more than six months ago, Rose Vanderpool our Land Use Administrator started the process to revise the gas and oil regulations. We are required by statute to have hearings first with the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) and then their recommendation goes before the County Commissioners. The Commissioners then must also have public hearings before approving or disapproving those gas and oil regulations.

This process has been somewhat slower than anticipated because of the the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC). The COGCC has been in the process of rewriting the State rules and regulations for oil and gas drilling for the entire state and thus Rio Grande County is trying to "match-up" our new regulations to match the State ones. We do not want to find that Rio Grande County rules and regs do not match or are in conflict with the state and then have to start over. COGCC has made final approval of the regulations on December 10th. Those recommendations now go to the State legislature for final approval; with Republicans vowing to fight the proposals (see The Denver Post December 11, 2008) originally they were to be approved by July 1, 2008.

In the mean time, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the County Commissioners have had a joint public work session and were able to have input from the public. More are being planned to be held in January. The P&Z and commissioners have worked hard on these issues. The commissioners have read and reviewed the oil & gas regulations from Gunnison, LaPlata, Archuleta and Saguache Counties. Several people have toured areas where there is drilling, we have brought in experts from both sides to discuss the issue and we keep working toward having good regulations for our County.
Robert Hagedorn for the Rio Grande County Commissioners