



Los Alamos County  
Community Development Department

**PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT**

**Public Hearing Date:** August 28, 2024  
**Subject:** Case No. REZ-2024-0019  
**Owners/Applicants:** Anthony Strain and Russell Naranjo, Project Managers with Los Alamos County Capital Projects and Facilities, on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner  
**Case Manager:** Desirae J. Lujan, Senior Planner

*Professional Background:*

*Associates Architectural & Civil Drafting; 16 years in Planning and Land Use, Local Government, with five years in Case Management of Development Applications.*

**CASE NO. REZ-2024-0019.** Anthony Strain, Project Manager with Los Alamos County Capital Projects and Facilities, on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner, is requesting a Minor Zone Map Amendment to change the property, EA3 U, from its current Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District to the Institutional (INS) Zone District. The property is commonly known as the Civilian Women’s Dormitory and is addressed as 1725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, within the Eastern Area 3 Subdivision. *See Attachment A: Application Submittal.*



Image 1: Google Earth Street Image, Nov. 2022 – Women’s Dorm Building east elevation facing 17<sup>th</sup> Street

## BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The subject property ("Property"), addressed as 1725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, is located within the Eastern Area 3 Subdivision and is bounded by streets on all sides: N Sage, 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Peach Street, and 18<sup>th</sup> Street. The neighborhood is contained within the collector streets of Canyon Road (north), 15<sup>th</sup> Street (east) and Nectar Street (south). The lot is 50,529 Sq. Ft. and is occupied by a two-story, 5,462 Sq. Ft. building known as the Women's Army Corp. Building, or Civilian Women's Dorm Building ("Women's Dorm Building"). In 1943 the Women's Dorm Building was constructed during the Manhattan Project Era and operated as a dormitory, and most recently as a religious institute. In 2019 the Christian Science Church approached the county about their desire to sell the property. Shortly after, the Los Alamos County approved the purchase and closed on the sale (2020).



Figure 1: Location Area Map, Collector Streets shown in red

To preserve and occupy the building, the County contracted Mullen-Heller Architecture (2021) to design and conduct public engagement to gather input from the public and stakeholders through a series of public meetings to determine best use for the property. In 2022, the County Council approved a conceptual design to renovate the building into a visitor center, with museum and exhibits, and associated office space and caretaker's unit for the National Park Service. Unfortunately, according to the Los Alamos County Development Code, Exhibit B, Section 16-14, Permitted Uses, those uses are not allowed in the current Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District. As a result, the county is asking to rezone the Property to the Institutional (INS) Zone District so that the project can proceed.

## ASSOCIATED APPLICATIONS

A Site Plan Adoption Application has been submitted as Case No. SIT-2024-0069 to be reviewed concurrently with this application. It includes lot improvements for parking, ingress/egress, circulation, grading and drainage, a detached restroom facility with picnic pavilion, landscaping, and lighting. Also, an application to obtain National Register of Historic Places status has been submitted and is under review.

## ZONING

The Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District is intended to accommodate single-family dwellings with a variety of lot sizes and dimensions in established neighborhoods to maintain and protect their character. The parcels north, west, and east of the subject property are mostly zoned Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) with Open Space-Public Park (OS-PP), Institutional (INS), and Multi-Family Residential, Medium Density (MFR-M) to the south. Lots adjacent to the west and east contain single-family homes, while the northern lots operate religious institutions, and a fraternity organization.



Figure 2: Vicinity Zoning Map

The Institutional (INS) Zone District is described in Section 16-7(d) of the Development Code as intended to accommodate institutional and civic uses, such as schools, libraries, transportation facilities, and publicly owned lands. Permitted uses include museums, and institutional and civic buildings defined as: “a building or structure owned, operated, or occupied by a governmental agency to provide a governmental service to the public.” The INS Zone District Standards also identify that any government-owned land within the INS Zone District may use the land and structures to support community needs and the public, health, safety, and welfare.

The INS Zone District, also, allows one caretaker unit, and requires neighborhood protection of abutting or adjacent residential zone districts pursuant with the Neighborhood Protection Standards of Section 16-43. Exhibit B, Section 16-7(d)(1)-b, states that in the case where the Property is used by another person under a lease or contract – a Conditional Use Permit must be obtained.

The Official Zoning Map illustrates properties owned by Los Alamos Public Schools and most county-owned properties, outside of a Downtown Zone District or Open Space, as within INS Zone District. **See Exhibit C.**

### **PRE-APPLICATION AND NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

Prior to the submission of a Zone Map Amendment application, the applicant is required, pursuant to Section 16-72(b)(1), to attend a Pre-Application Meeting and to conduct a Neighborhood Meeting.

- *Pre-Application [16-72-(b)(1)]:*  
The applicant attended a pre-application meeting with county staff on **April 1, 2024.**
- *Neighborhood Meeting [16-72-(b)(2)]*
  - Property Owners (300-ft) were mailed notice of a Neighborhood Meeting on **April 28, 2024.**
  - The applicant held a Neighborhood meeting on **May 4, 2024.** A Summary of the meeting and associated documents are included in Attachment A, Application Submittal.

### **INTERDEPARTMENTAL REVIEW COMMITTEE (IDRC) REVIEW**

The Interdepartmental Review Committee (IDRC) reviewed the application for a Minor Zone Map Amendment on August 1, 2024, and did not have concerns with a rezone. A vote of consensus was made to move the application forward to the August 28, 2024, scheduled Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

*See Attachment B: IDRC Minutes*

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

The *Los Alamos County Code of Ordinances, Chapter 16 – Development Code, Sec. 16-72(c) Notifications*, sets forth the requirements for proper notice to the public for a public hearing:

- *Published and Posted Notice [16-72(c)(4)]:*
  - Notice published in a newspaper of general circulation within the County at least 14-calendar days before the meeting or hearing. **Published on August 8, 2024.**
  - The posting of at least one sign on a street abutting the property that is the subject of the application – visible from the street – for at least 14-calendar days before the public meeting or hearing. **Posted on August 12, 2024.**

- Mailed Notice [16-72-(c)(5)]:
  - Mailed notice 14-days prior to the public hearing to all owners of record as identified in the records of the County Tax Assessor or occupants of properties within 300 ft., excluding public rights-of-way, of exterior lot lines of the subject property. **Mailed Certified on August 8, 2024.**

**The notices specified that the public hearing would be located at 1000 Central Ave, Los Alamos, NM, with an option for the public to provide comment virtually, via Zoom.**

As of the drafting of this report, August 14, 2024, staff has not received any comment or questions from the public.

See Attachment C: Public Notices

### **MINOR ZONE MAP AMENDMENT**

Section 16-74(h) of the Los Alamos County Development Code states that an application for a Zone Map Amendment of the Official Zoning Map shall be approved if it meets all the following criteria:

- a. **The proposed Zone Map Amendment is consistent with the health, safety, and welfare of the County as shown by conformance with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and other adopted County plans or policies.**

**Applicant Response:** The proposed Zone Map Amendment conforms with the Comprehensive Plan regarding the health, safety, and welfare of the County:

- 1) Supporting the efforts to market and brand Los Alamos as a scenic destination featuring recreation, science, and history, attract new tourism-related business, and revitalize areas of Los Alamos and White Rock to maximize the use of County owned land. Potential strategy mentioned in the Comprehensive Plan "Partner with the National Park Service and others to promote Los Alamos County as an outdoor recreation destination".
- 2) The Comprehensive Plan describes the Purpose of the Future Land Use Map and states that the Comprehensive Plan intends that rezoning applications for uses that conform to the Future Land Use Map would follow an expedited and less onerous application and review process than those proposals for use that do not conform to uses shown on the Future Land Use Map.
- 3) The Comprehensive Plan goes on to explain how changes to zoning should conform to the Future Land Use Map as is the request in this application.
- 4) Growth:
  - a. Maximize our opportunity with respect to the development of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park.
  - b. Capitalize on Los Alamos County's role as a gateway to three national parks.
  - c. Enhance community pride.
- 5) Redevelopment:
  - a. Often involves updating or replacing old, substandard structures with new, healthier living environments that meet current building codes.

- b. The Manhattan Project National Historical Park has outgrown its current location in Los Alamos County to the point that staff and exhibits are divided into two separate locations. This project will allow the Manhattan Project National Historical Park to expand their efforts and combine into one central location as a redevelopment project.
- c. Upgrading the site traffic circulation patterns and parking will improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and the public alike.
- d. Through code compliance efforts, the project will ensure that the new development meets current safety codes and regulations.

**Staff Response:** In the staff’s expert opinion this criterion has been met because the Future Land Use Map (“FLUM”) is adopted by the Comprehensive Plan, Exhibit A, Page 111, and is an expression of its goals and policies to direct future growth and change and depicts land use classifications with broad categories. Although the land use classifications do not directly correspond to zoning, it is intended to illustrate a preferred and anticipated land use. The Women’s Dorm property is shown on Figure 3: Vicinity FLUM, as Institutional. Land Use Policies for Development Goals include, “Ensure greater certainty in the development review process especially if the application conforms to the Comprehensive Plan and the Future Land Use Map.”

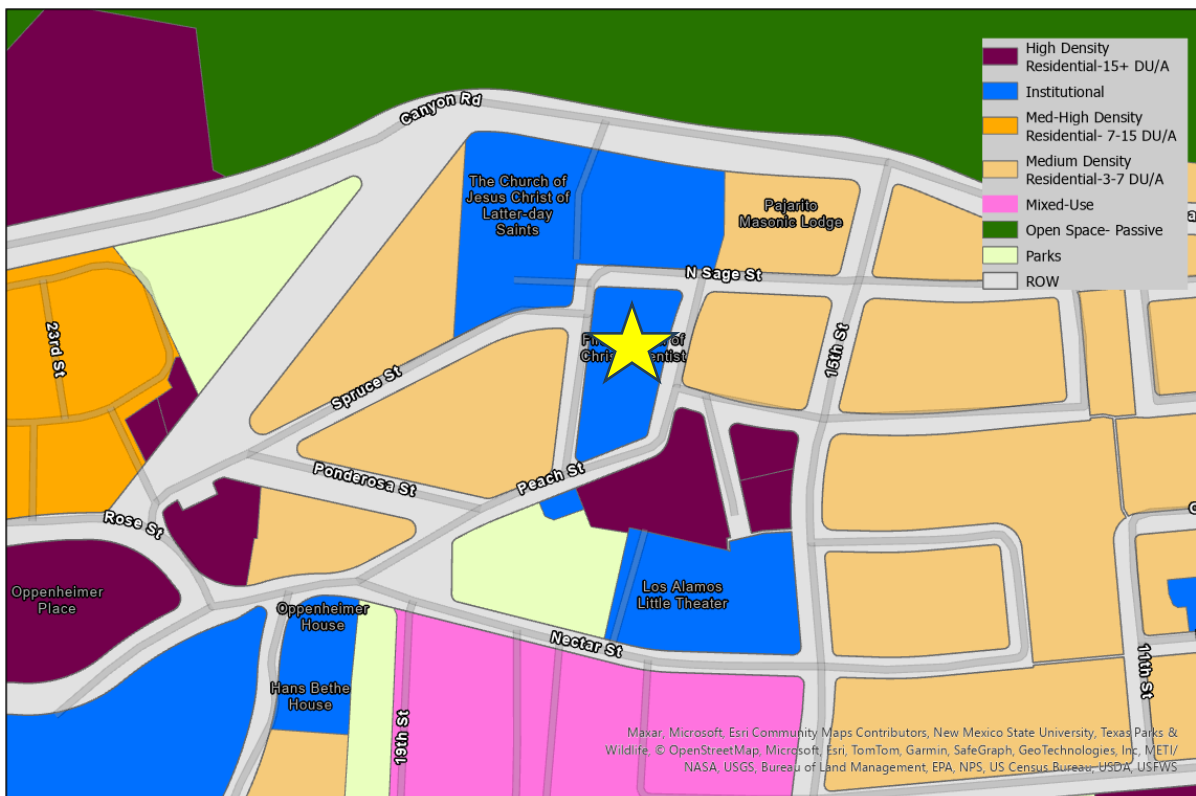


Figure 3: Vicinity Future Land Use Map

The Plan adopts goals and policies to direct and promote growth within the community and ensure its success. Land Use Policies for the core themes of Growth and Development Goals include maximizing the use of County-owned lands, Page 71. Keeping the property a Single-Family Residential Zone District minimizes use of the land to residential use with a density of one dwelling unit per lot. Whereas the Institutional (INS) Zone District is more valuable to the community by

expanding the services that the lot can provide to the community, such as for a visitor center, and museum.

Also, a goal for County redevelopment is to redevelop vacant blighted areas and underutilized properties, Page 81. The existing building has been vacant since the county took ownership. A rezone of the property encourages redevelopment of the existing building and site which can create a new opportunity to attract visitors and enhance community pride, Page 70.

**b. The existing zone district designation is shown to be inappropriate for one or more of the following reasons:**

- 1. It was established in error;**
- 2. Changed conditions warrant the rezoning; or**
- 3. A different zone is more advantageous to the community as articulated by conformance with each applicable goal and policy of the Comprehensive Plan, including the future land use map.**

**Applicant Response:** Los Alamos County purchased the former Christian Science Church which was originally constructed as a woman's dormitory during the Manhattan Project era. The underlying zoning at the time of purchase is SFR-4 which does allow for a church of worship but does not specifically allow for a visitor center, museum, or caretakers suite. After careful consideration of multiple designs, and several public meetings to discuss the potential use of the property, the council has given direction to pursue the use as a visitor center and museum under the direction of the National Park Service to house and operate the Manhattan Project National Historic Park.

Based on the direction of Council, a zoning amendment is necessary to pursue the requested use. The future land use map reflects the zoning as INS which is in keeping with the underlying zoning designation of most properties owned by the County.

**Staff Response:** In the staff's expert opinion this criterion has been met because the change of ownership from private to public is a changed condition that warrants a rezone. The Institutional (INS) Zone District will be more advantageous to the community by redeveloping a vacant building into a visitor center and museum, with associated office space. When the property was in private ownership, the Single-Family Residential Zone District (SFR-4) allowed for past uses such as dormitory, and religious institutions. However, for the county to maximize use of the land and proceed with approved plans for the site, zoning needs to be changed. As detailed in Criterion A, and illustrated in Figure 3: Vicinity FLUM, the proposed INS Zone District is in conformance with the Future Land Use Map.

**c. The proposed zoning will not designate a zone district different from surrounding zone districts to one small area, i.e. create a spot zone, unless one or more of the following criteria are met:**

- 1. Granting such zoning accomplishes the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan;**
- 2. Unique characteristics specific to the site exist; or**
- 3. The zoning serves as an appropriate transition between land uses of higher and lower intensity.**

**4. The County's existing and proposed infrastructure and public improvements including, but not limited to utilities, streets, sidewalks, or trails have adequate capacity to serve the development made possible by the Zone Map Amendment.**

**Applicant Response:** The granting of an INS zoning designation for the property located at 172517th Street is in keeping with the future land use map and is necessary to pursue the Council request to create a visitor center, museum, and caretaker's unit. The INS zone accomplishes the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan regarding:

- Supporting the efforts to market and brand Los Alamos as a scenic destination featuring recreation, science, and history, attract new tourism-related business, and revitalize and eliminate blight in the area.
- Maximizing our opportunity with respect to the development of the Manhattan Project Historical Park. Currently, the Manhattan Project Historical Park has outgrown its current location. By completing this project of refurbishing the existing woman's dormitory building, this will allow the National Park Service to support the efforts to market and brand Los Alamos as a scenic destination, and to capitalize on Los Alamos County's role as a gateway to three national parks
- Public services and facilities required to serve the proposed development have adequate capacity and would conform with the requirements of the County's construction standards. A Pre-application meeting with relevant County departments occurred on April 4, 2024. Utilities are both available and existing, and currently on-site, and have adequate capacity to serve the project. Improvements will be made to improve upon some of the existing infrastructure for fire suppression, water, sewer, and irrigation. The existing sidewalk system will involve the construction of new sidewalks and/or the improvement of the existing sidewalks. All improvements will be made in accordance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.
- The tie into the Urban Trail will be looked at in depth to determine if the proper right of way is in existence to create a trail system incorporating this property within its system.

**Staff Response:** It is the staff's expert opinion that this criterion has been met because as shown within Figure 2: Vicinity Zoning Map, a small adjacent parcel southwest of the subject property is zoned INS. This contiguous zoning, excluding public right-of-way, eliminates the creation of "spot zoning".

Also as established in Criterion A and B, the Institutional (INS) Zone District accomplishes the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and is aligned with the Future Land Use Map ("FLUM"). If approved, the location area would show a transition – southbound - from Institutional uses to Multi-Family, Commercial and Open Space uses, and into the Downtown area. IDRC has evaluated the existing and proposed infrastructure and improvements and have determined that they are adequate to serve an INS Zone District and the planned use of the site.

**d. The establishment, maintenance, or operation of uses made possible by the Zone Map Amendment will not be detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of persons residing or working adjacent to or within the proximity of the subject property.**

**Applicant Response:** Public services and facilities required to serve the proposed development have adequate capacity and would conform with the requirements of the County's construction standards. A Pre-application meeting with relevant County departments occurred on April 4, 2024. Utilities are both available and existing, and currently on-site, and have adequate capacity to serve the project. Improvements will be made to improve upon some of the existing infrastructure for fire suppression, water, sewer, and irrigation. The existing sidewalk system will involve the construction of new sidewalks and/or the improvement of the existing sidewalks. All improvements will be made in accordance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

The tie into the Urban Trail will be looked at in depth to determine if the proper right of way is in existence to create a trail system incorporating this property within its system.

**Staff Response:** It is the staff's expert opinion that this criterion has been met because Institutional Uses operating in the vicinity are comparable to those that will be permitted and are planned for the property. The INS Zone District allows for some Commercial Uses, but to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the neighborhood, and community, the Development Code requires public hearings for Site Plan Adoption when a property significantly changes its function, appearance, or use. ***See Exhibit B, Section 16-14, Permitted Uses, and 16-74(i) Site Plan Adoption or Major Amendment.***

## **DRAFT MOTION**

### **Motion Option 1:**

I move to recommend that the County Council **approve** Case No. **REZ-2024-0019**, a request from Los Alamos County Capital Projects and Facilities Division, on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner. Approval would amend the zone district of the Property, EA3 U, from its current Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District to the Institutional (INS) Zone District. The Property is commonly known as the Women's Dorm Building and is addressed as 1725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, within the Eastern Area 3 Subdivision.

Approval is based on the Findings of Facts established at the hearing and conclusion that the Applicant has met the decision criteria for a Minor Zone Map Amendment pursuant to Section 16-74(h)(3) of the Los Alamos County Development Code and that the Commission is acting under the authority granted by Section 16-69-(b)(1) of the Development Code.

I further move to authorize the Chair to sign a Final Order approving the application and Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law for this case, based on this decision to be prepared by county staff.

### **Motion Option 2:**

I move to recommend that the County Council **deny** Case No. **REZ-2024-0019**, a request from Los Alamos County Capital Projects and Facilities, on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner. The application proposes amending the zone district of the Property, EA3 U, from its current Single-Family Residential (SFR-4) Zone District to the Institutional (INS) Zone District. The Property is commonly known as the Women's Dorm Building and is addressed as 1725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, within the Eastern Area 3 Subdivision.

Denial is based on the Applicant failing to demonstrate that the application meets the Minor Zone Map Amendment decision criteria within Section 16-74-(h)(3) of the Los Alamos County Development Code, and that the Commission is acting under the authority granted by Section 16-69(b)(1) of the Development Code.

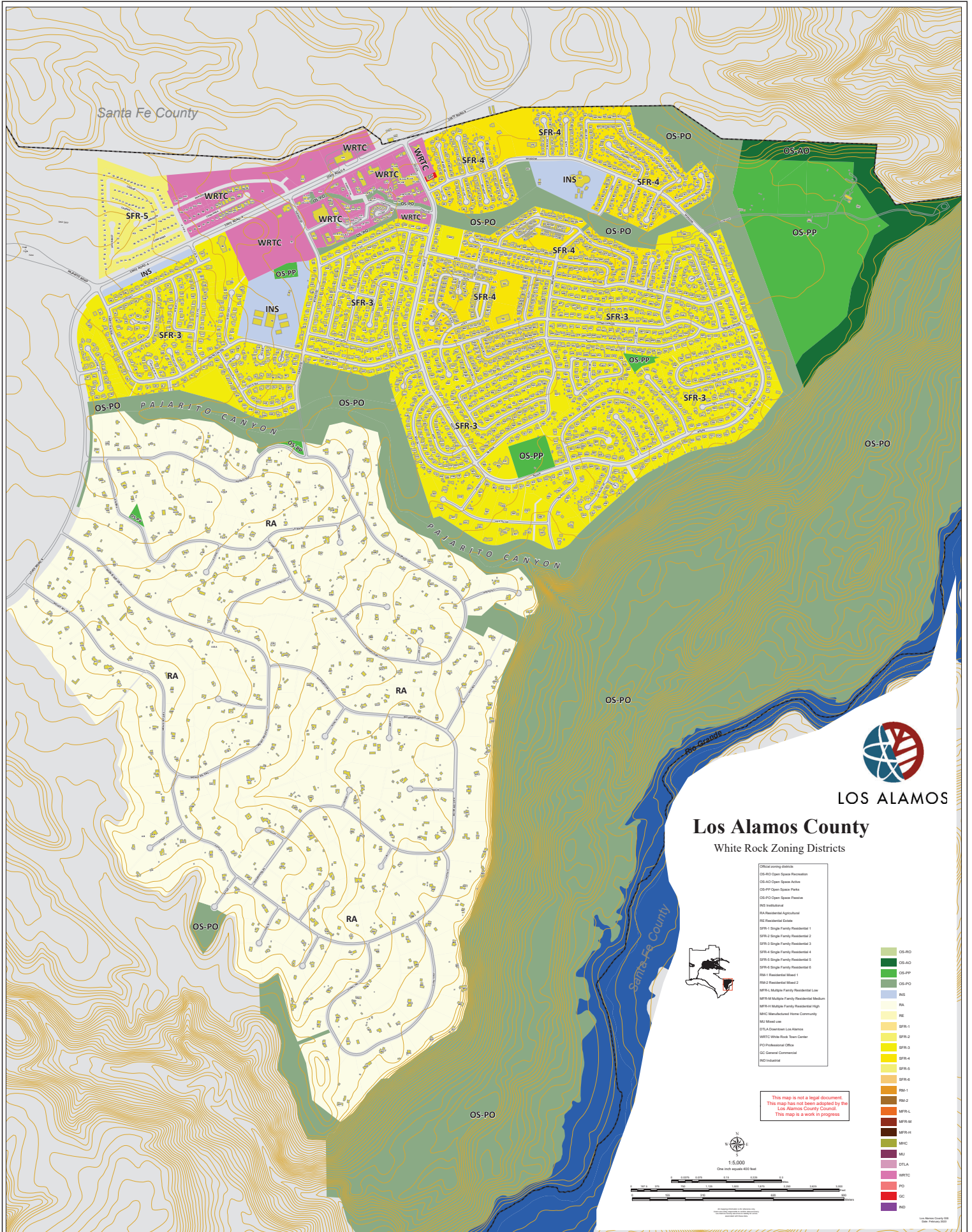
I further move to authorize the Chair to sign a Final Order approving the application and Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law for this case, based on this decision to be prepared by county staff.

**EXHIBITS:**

A – Comprehensive Plan: <https://lacnm.com/ComprehensivePlan2016>

B – Los Alamos County, Chapter 16, Development Code: <https://lacnm.com/MunicipalCode>

C – Official Zoning Maps



ATTACHMENT D - EXHIBIT C

