



Los Alamos County

Community Development Department

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Public Hearing Date: May 14, 2025
Subject: Case No. CPA-2025-0009
Applicant/Owner: Sobia Sayeda, Project Manager with Los Alamos County Capital Improvements and Facilities Division, on behalf of Los Alamos County, Property Owner
Case Manager: Jane Mathews, Senior Planner

Case Manager's Professional Background:

Dual Master's Degree in City and Regional Planning, and Landscape Architecture; 26 years in Regional Planning, Land Use, Transportation Planning, and Placemaking; six years in Local Government Zoning, Platting, and Development Case Management.

Case No. CPA-2025-0009: Los Alamos County Capital Improvements and Facilities Division, on behalf of Los Alamos County, property owner, requests Planning and Zoning Commission to make recommendation to County Council for an amendment to the Los Alamos County Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map (FLUM). A FLUM amendment is being requested to expand the map's Institutional area to accommodate a subsequent rezoning for the renovation of Fire Station #4. All Minor Zone Map Amendments (rezonings) must be consistent with the Future Land Use Map. The FLUM amendment would change a portion of the map to show Open Space – Passive (dark green) to Institutional (aqua), increasing the Institutional (INS) area from 81,500 square feet to 100,234 square feet. The subject property, designated as NC2 G and NC2 H, is located within the North Community 2 Subdivision and is zoned Open Space - Passive Open (OS-PO) and Institutional (INS).

See Attachment A: Application Submittal.



Image 1: Google Earth Street Image, May 2025 – Fire Station 4 from Diamond Drive.



Figure 1: Townsite Future Land Use Map (FLUM), page 111, Comprehensive Plan Los Alamos County 2016. Parcels involved in the application are circled.

BACKGROUND

The subject properties ("Property"), addressed as 4401 Diamond Drive and 9999 Range Road, are located within the Northern Community 2 Subdivision, Lots G and H, respectively. The property is bounded by Club Road to the west, Diamond Drive to the south, and extends towards San Ildefonso Rd. The larger parcel zoned Open Space - Passive Open (OS-PO), extends along Range Road to Guaje Pines Cemetery. Woodland Trail is north of the Fire Station and a spur extends to the Fire Station parking lot.

An amendment to the Los Alamos County Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is being requested to expand the area designated for Institutional use. The FLUM amendment will change a portion of the map from Open Space – Passive (dark green) to Institutional (aqua), increasing the Institutional (INS) area from 81,500 square feet to 100,234 square feet.

All Minor Zone Map Amendments (rezonings) must be consistent with the Future Land Use Map. This amendment is the first step in the land use process for the renovation and expansion of Fire Station 4, as directed by County Council. The applicant intends to rezone the property to align the Fire Station parcel with the zoning map. The Fire Station 4 site is currently zoned Institutional (INS) but expansion will require extending into an area zoned Open Space - Passive Open (OS-PO) to accommodate the project.

Article I, Division 5, establishes the relationship between Chapter 16 and the Comprehensive Plan, stating: "any applicant seeking to amend the official zoning map to a zone district that is inconsistent with the adopted Comprehensive Plan must first obtain approval from Planning and Zoning Commission and the County Council..."



Figure 2: Location Area Map, Collector Streets shown in red. Fire Station 4 is shown in blue, the FLUM Open Space is shown in green. The difference is the FLUM change, shown in orange.

SUMMARY

Fire Station 4 was constructed in 1964 and upgraded in 2002. Fire Station 4 contains five bays with sleeping and living areas on the north side and work and storage areas on the south side. A separate structure, the Annex, was built near the station to house additional fire apparatus. The Annex contains four additional bays and provides additional storage for reserve units. The 2002 upgrade is now over 20 years old and no longer meets the community's fire protection or operational needs. A new facility is proposed to better accommodate modern fire apparatus and personnel requirements.

In 2024, Los Alamos County contracted VEGA Architecture to conduct public engagement through a series of meetings evaluating three County-owned sites for the replacement of Fire Station 4. The site was selected based on the following criteria: maintaining response times; location on county-owned property; ability to keep the existing Fire Station 4 operational during construction; relatively level ground; access to existing utilities infrastructure; and design and cost feasibility. The current Fire Station 4 site was selected by the public and approved by County Council at the November 12, 2024, council meeting. VEGA Architecture is contracted to complete the site evaluation, schematic design, and public outreach.

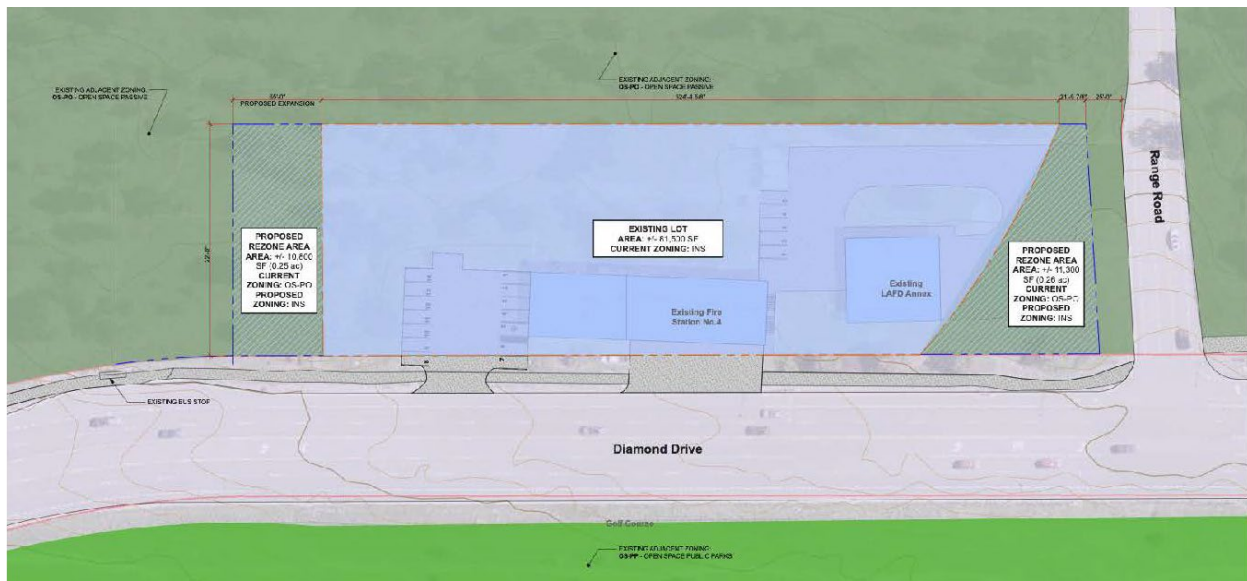


Figure 3: Location Area Map illustrating the current Fire Station 4 parcel zoned Industrial (IND). The proposed fire station buildings will exceed the current parcel to the east and west, expanding into the areas designated Open Space – Passive on the FLUM.

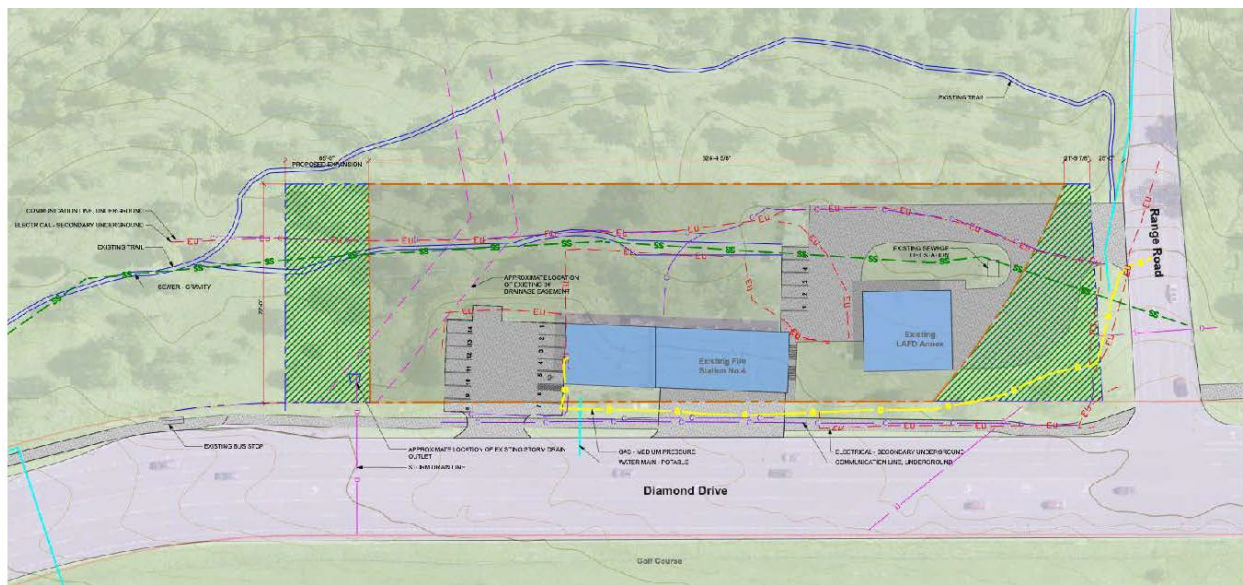


Figure 4: Location Area Map illustrating the areas for expansion into the areas designated Open-Space – Passive on the FLUM. These areas measure 65 feet x 22 feet on the northwest side, and approximately 22 feet x 65 feet on the southeast side. Additionally, the Woodland Trail and connection to the Fire Station trailhead are shown in blue. IDRC considered the utilities existing in the area and found no issues.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL REVIEW COMMITTEE (IDRC) REVIEW

A required pre-application meeting was held February 11, 2025, between the applicant's team and Interdepartmental Review Committee (IDRC) members to review schematic utility plans for the new Fire Station 4. The IDRC later conferred via email April 11, 2025, to revisit the schematic designs and application request. The Department of Public Utilities indicated no anticipated burdens on the utility system and provided preliminary guidance for the utility plan to serve the new fire station. The County Engineer noted a traffic analysis is not required and had no additional comments.

See Attachment B: IDRC Email

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Los Alamos County Code of Ordinances, Chapter 16 – Development Code, Sec. 16-71 Procedures Summary Table, sets forth the notice requirements, when or if pre-application meetings with staff or neighbor meetings are required, which county bodies review and make a decision on the application, and in which cases a public meeting or hearing is required.

An application for a Comprehensive Plan Adoption or Amendment Recommendation requires a published newspaper advertisement and a pre-application meeting. Section 16-72(c) Notifications, establishes the public notice requirements for a public hearing:

- Published 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 April 24, 2025.**

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.

See Attachment C: Public Notices

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT DECISION CRITERIA

Section 16-75(a)(3) of the Los Alamos County Development Code states that applications to amend the Comprehensive Plan shall explain how it conforms to the decision criteria in section 16-75(a)(3), why the amendment is necessary, and cite the sections of the Comprehensive Plan to be amended. Section 16-75(a)(3) outlines the decision criteria and states that an application shall be approved if it meets all the following criteria:

- a. **The amendment is consistent with the overall vision, policies, and other parts of the comprehensive plan, the strategic leadership plan of the county council, and other adopted county policies and plans.**

Applicant Response: The Amendment to the Future Land Use map conforms to the overall vision and policies of the Comp Plan and aligns with the Health Safety and Welfare goals of the Strategic Leadership Plan of the County Council. Exhibit A indicates the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) from 2016 Comprehensive plan showing current zoning of Institutional (INS) and Open Space - Passive Open (OS-PO) Zone Districts. The proposed change does not create a spot zone or add new zoning to the area; rather expands the current INS zone by 18,734 SF. The existing OS-PO parcel is 278,273 SF, which will be reduced to 259,539 SF. And the existing INS parcel is 81,500 SF and will be increased to 100,234 SF. See Exhibit A and B

By Amending the FLUM is consistent with the overall vision and policies of the Comprehensive Plan, specifically: Section 4.1 discusses the purpose of the FLUM to identify proximity and relation of uses; which this project maintains that existing FLUM zone relationship. Section 3.1 Land Use Policy notes to maximize the utilization of County owned land; which this project utilizes by siting the building on County owned parcels. Section 3.3 Open Space Infrastructure policy notes to support green infrastructure; the new fire station will be LEED Silver Certified. Section 3.3 Trail Goals notes to improve the trail system; this project will create a new trail access point and vehicular parking with EV charging stations for trail users.

Staff Response:

Staff supports the applicant's references to Comprehensive Plan Sections 3.1, 3.3, and 4.1.

- Section 3.1 Land Use Policies #5 indicates the utilization of County owned land to support housing – the proposed fire station supports existing housing and the capacity to support new development.
- Section 3.3 Open Space Infrastructure Policies #2 supports green infrastructure by minimizing infrastructure impacts to the open space, and #3 maximize coordination efforts between Community Services and the Department of Public Utilities. This project achieves both by maintaining utilities upgrades on the current site rather than extending new utilities elsewhere.
- Section 3.3 Trail Goal #1 is to “improve and expand the trails system.” The schematic design presented to staff in the pre-application meeting shows improved connection to a new trail head parking area on the Fire Station 4 property.
- Section 4.1 puts the Comprehensive Plan Amendment application in context, saying that the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is an expression of the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan, and that the FLUM is a guiding document.

The Future Land Use Map amendment supports Council's Strategic Goals, primarily Public Safety as a fundamental part of Quality of Life. Secondly, Operational Excellence: Effective, Efficient, Reliable Services, and Infrastructure Asset Management.

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of open space to the Los Alamos community, and the parcels involved in this Comprehensive Plan Amendment application have been earmarked for preservation as Open Space - Passive. Because of the increased fire risk, the *Open Space Management Plan* (2015) was adopted to recognize how open space should be used:

“The Open Space System should protect and preserve certain parcels of undeveloped land that contain significant wildlife habitat or corridors, cultural resources, trails, or serve as areas for flood or wildfire protection. The system should align with the land uses defined on the Land Use Map that is part of the Comprehensive Plan Update.”

Sec. 16-75(a)-(2) Procedures j. states that approval by county council resolution “shall refer expressly to revisions to specific elements, the addition of elements, maps, descriptive matter, changes to the vision statement, policy plan and goals, or other revisions intended by the planning and zoning commission to form the whole or part of the comprehensive plan.” The applicant has provided maps and descriptions to support their request to revise specific elements of the Comprehensive Plan – the Future Land Use Map. The application is specific, and the request is targeted to the needs of the intended project outcome.

b. The amendment replaces outdated information in the comprehensive plan, responds to changed conditions, or provides new information which is not included in the comprehensive plan.

Applicant Response: The need for a new fire station was not anticipated within the 2016 Comprehensive Plan. Due to present-day needs of a fire station facility that meets health, safety, and welfare of its users a new fire station is necessary that includes decontamination zones, privacy for female firefighters, updated HVAC and plumbing, and is designed to be electric-ready for the 2050 all electric initiative. The new station will also allow for more firefighters to be staffed at one time, addressing the future growth anticipated in Los Alamos. The existing fire station must remain fully operational during construction of the new station, so the existing parcel does not fully fit the proposed fire station, thus requiring the amendment to the FLUM to expand the INS zone. While this was not foreseen in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, this amendment to the FLUM will

have a positive impact that aligns with the goals and values of the Comprehensive Plan as outlined in response A.

Staff Response: The amendment to the Future Land Use Map will provide new information in terms of recognizing the protection of open space, wildlife, and housing in the form of better fire facilities. The county has provided ample information regarding the need for a new fire station to provide fire life safety on the north side of Los Alamos Township. The Comprehensive Plan does not specifically mention fire protection goals, however there is a strong theme of open space protection, environmental stewardship and wildlife habitat. Certainly, the provisions of increased firefighting capabilities support those goals and should be included in a comprehensive plan FLUM amendment.

c. The adoption or amendment will protect the public health, safety, or welfare *better* than retention of the continued application of the existing comprehensive plan.

Applicant Response: The update to the FLUM reflecting the increase in the INS use of the potential increased property line will protect the public health, safety, and welfare goals of the Comp Plan and County Council Strategic Goals. This site was approved by the County Council on 11/12/24 to locate the Fire Station No. 4 replacement. The existing fire station needs to remain fully operational during construction, a lot line expansion via a subsequent Summary Plat application is requested. Once the lot lines are expanded these portions of the property warrant making the zoning consistent within the property; therefore, re-zoning these portions from OS-PO to INS would allow for the property to be consistently zoned INS.

Staff Response: Los Alamos is surrounded by fire-adapted forest ecosystems and has experienced significant wildfires. At the time the Comprehensive Plan was written, in 2015-2016, the most recent fire in Los Alamos was the Las Conchas (2011), while the Cerro Grande (2000) remains the most destructive. Most recently, the Los Alamos Fire Department responded to the Cerro Pelado fire near Jemez Springs in 2022. The areas designated as Open Space – Passive on the Future Land Use Map should be recognized as being Wildland – Urban Interface lands.

The Fire Department has shown, and County Council has agreed, that a modern fire station is needed to provide better for the health, safety, and welfare of residents and property owners in Los Alamos. The Los Alamos Fire Department (LAFD) has established improved wildland-urban interface codes to assure residents that their homes will continue to be protected from fire and remain insured. Chapter 22 Fire Prevention and Protection outlines the adoption of fire codes “for the purpose of prescribing regulations governing conditions hazardous to life, the environment, and property from fire or explosion...”

Sec. 22-131. - Wildland urban interface and fuels management states:

“The fire code official shall have the authority to promulgate rules, regulations, policies, guidelines, fee schedules, forms and processes to supplement the county's fire codes to provide for mitigation of the fire and life safety hazards associated with the wildland urban interface areas.”

d. The adoption or amendment will result in general benefits to a large portion of the residents or property owners in the county.

Applicant Response: The existing fire station building was developed by Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and later conveyed to the County by Department of Energy (DOE) in 1998. The existing fire station currently operates in providing essential operations beneficial to public health, safety, and welfare. The Comprehensive Plan Amendment to Future Land Use Map will allow for the a new fire station with modern amenities to continue this effort to serve the Los

Alamos County residents and businesses. Various studies conducted at the existing fire station site indicate that response times are within targets and utilizing this locations is suitable for a new fire station. See Exhibit C. The new fire station, made possible by this Comprehensive Plan Amendment, will further improve firefighter response efficiencies and their own and the public's health, safety, and welfare through the design of the new fire station.

Staff Response: The existing facility is outdated and must be brought up-to-date to better serve Los Alamos County's residents and property owners. Many new subdivisions have been built on Barranca Mesa and North Mesa since the 2000s that are being provided with fire protection from a facility built in 1968. The proposed fire station will have increased personnel capacity and the addition of larger fire apparatus to better serve Los Alamos County Township and the surrounding areas. The Fire Department has shown, and County Council has agreed, that a new fire station is needed to provide better for the health, safety, and welfare of residents and property owners in Los Alamos.

DRAFT MOTION

Recommended Motion Option 1:

I move to **approve** a recommendation to County Council for Case No. **CPA-2025-0009**, a request for an amendment to the Los Alamos County Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map (FLUM). A FLUM amendment is being requested to expand the map's Institutional area to accommodate a subsequent rezoning for the renovation of Fire Station #4. The FLUM amendment would change a portion of the map to show Open Space – Passive (dark green) to Institutional (aqua), increasing the Institutional (INS) area from 81,500 square feet to 100,234 square feet. The subject property, designated as NC2 G and NC2 H, is located within the North Community 2 Subdivision and is zoned Open Space - Passive Open (OS-PO) and Institutional (INS).

Approval is based on the Findings of Fact established at the hearing and the conclusion that the Applicant has met the decision criteria for a Comprehensive Plan Adoption or Amendment within Section 16-75(a)(3) of the Los Alamos County Development Code, and that the Commission renders this decision under the authority granted to it in Section 16-69(b)(1) of the Development Code.

I further move to authorize the Chair to sign a Final Order approving the application for recommendation to Council, as well as the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law for this case in support of this decision, which will be prepared by county staff.

Motion Option 2:

I move to **deny** Case No. **CPA-2025-0009** for a recommendation to County Council, a request for an amendment to the Los Alamos County Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map (FLUM). A FLUM amendment is being requested to expand the map's Institutional area to accommodate a subsequent rezoning for the renovation of Fire Station #4. The FLUM amendment would change a portion of the map to show Open Space – Passive (dark green) to Institutional (aqua), increasing the Institutional (INS) area from 81,500 square feet to 100,234 square feet. The subject property, designated as NC2 G and NC2 H, is located within the North Community 2 Subdivision and is zoned Open Space - Passive Open (OS-PO) and Institutional (INS).

Denial is based on the Applicant failing to demonstrate that the decision criteria was met for a Comprehensive Plan Adoption or Amendment within Section 16-75(a)(3) of the Los Alamos County Development Code, and that the Commission renders this decision under the authority granted to it in Section 16-69(b)(1) of the Development Code.

I further move to authorize the Chair to sign the Final Order recommending denial of the application for this case based on this decision, which will be prepared by county staff.

EXHIBITS:

- 1 – Comprehensive Plan: <https://lacnm.com/ComprehensivePlan2016>
- 2 – Strategic Leadership Plan: <https://lacnm.com/StrategicPlan>
- 3 – Los Alamos County, Chapter 16, Development Code: <https://lacnm.com/MunicipalCode>