

**Final
Torrance County Board of Commissioners
Regular Commission Meeting
July 22, 2026
9:00AM**

Commissioners Present:

**RYAN SCHWEBACH – COUNTY CHAIRMAN
KEVIN MCCALL- COUNTY COMMISSIONER
LINDA JARAMILLO – COUNTY VICE-CHAIR**

Others Present:

**STEPHANIE Y. REYNOLDS-COUNTY MANAGER
MICHELLE JONES-DEPUTY COUNTY MANAGER~ Absent
MICHAEL GARCIA- COUNTY ATTORNEY
SYLVIA CHAVEZ-COUNTY CLERK
MACKENZIE CARLSON- ADMINASTRATIVE ASSISTANT
DON GOEN – PLANNING & ZONING DIRECTOR**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Schwebach Calls meeting to order at 9:02AM

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND INNVOICATION

- Pledge led by **Chairman Schwebach**
 - Invocation led by **Commissioner Jaramillo**
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3. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

No changes

4. PUBLIC COMMENT (Comment limited to TWO Minutes)

Kim Ortiz- Torrance County Resident

- Torrance County resident, business owner in Torrance County and City of Moriarty

Key Points & Concerns:

- Initial Contact & Secrecy
 - Was approached, along with husband and son, by Stephanie Reynolds (introduced as from Torrance County Economic Development).
 - Told their ranch was of interest to Torrance County development and a private entity; no names, dates, or specific details disclosed.
 - Learned the effort was called “Project Mars”; initially assumed it was a data center (referencing a separate “Project Jupiter” down south).
 - Nature of Project & Impacts
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- Later informed by Senator Liz Stefonics that this is not a data center, but a proposed ballistic manufacturing and testing site.
- Reynolds allegedly:
 - Asked when their state lease was up and indicated the county would buy out the lease.
 - Suggested they could relocate their ranch and would be “possibly compensated” for losses.
 - Spoke with a tone of finality, causing significant alarm for the family.
- Information Gathering – ARA & Testing
 - Ortiz researched defense programs and found ARA operating at the Davis Pits:
 - Currently conducting explosive testing including chemical, biological, radiological, and advanced energetics.
 - Needs large field space for field detonation.
 - Purchasing drones to photograph land/mass displacement from explosions.
 - Stated that every objective includes data analysis, raising concern that this could include an AI/data center component.
 - According to Ortiz’s research, ARA is:
 - Currently using less than 1% of the “shot” (allowable blasting) in the county.
 - Allegedly already “pushing the limits” on other operations.
- Zoning & Use of Moriarty Airport Area
 - Urges detailed review of zoning around:
 - Davis Pits
 - Moriarty Airport
 - Believes the area is likely being used for airstrip access, testing, and data/analysis activities.
- Community Participation & Scheduling
 - Emphasizes that many affected residents are blue-collar workers who work from sunup to past sundown, making it hard to attend Wednesday 9:00 a.m. meetings.
 - Feels “a few people are in charge of our future” because working families cannot be present.
- Transparency & Process Concerns
 - Believes the county and partners are:
 - Trying to get zoning and permitting quietly.
 - Trying to buy or access land and “get all their ducks in a row” before the public is aware, reducing potential public opposition.
 - Worried about:
 - Land stripping
 - Water use
 - Electricity demands (not currently available at needed scale).
- Call to Action
 - Urges residents to:
 - Attend planning and zoning and commission meetings.
 - Monitor bonds, land purchases, and fund allocation.
 - Believes current actions are not in the best interest of Torrance County or its rural community.

Randi Metzger- Torrance County Resident

- Is a lifelong resident of Torrance County; raised in Moriarty
- Part of Williams Holdings LLC, her late grandfather's ranch
- Property Context:
 - Ranch borders Kim and Ernie's property.
 - Family owns the Williams Pit, which borders the Davis Pit.

Key Points & Concerns:

- Rumors & Potential Land Impacts
 - Has heard rumors that their state lease acreage could also be stripped or taken for the project.
 - States they have not been approached directly like Kim and Ernie but are deeply affected by proximity and rumors.
- Process & Secrecy
 - Feels the project is being done "under the ropes":
 - Refers to closed meetings and non-disclosure agreements.
 - Mentions awareness of "signing papers" that bar discussion.
- Trust & Community Impact
 - Says the name "Project Mars" and the secrecy make residents feel "they're up to no good".
 - Concerned about land, water, and family history being put at risk without input from landowners.
- Request to the Commission
 - Asks that affected landowners be informed and given a say in what is happening.
 - Emphasizes that they are members of Torrance County and deserve transparency.

Caleb James Ortiz- Torrance County Resident

- Fifth-generation resident of Torrance County

Focus: Open Meetings Act compliance, minutes, and bond/land purchase transparency.

Key Points & Specifics:

- Reference for Open Meetings Act Resolution
 - Cites the Commission's own Resolution 26-02 (adopted January 14) regarding the Open Meetings Act.
 - Notes it requires draft minutes within 10 working days of every meeting, available to the public.
 - All three commissioners' signatures are on this resolution.
- Missing / Deficient Minutes
 - June 24th minutes:
 - Posted only this week, weeks passed the 10-day deadline.
 - When posted, they show:
 - A land purchase approved with no seller name, no acreage, no location, and no price recorded.
 - A water rights purchase from "Mr. Larson" with:
 - No first name
 - No amount
 - No price
 - No source identified.

- States that state law § 10-15-1 requires minutes to record the substance of what was considered, which these minutes do not.
- No minutes exist (as of his review) for:
 - May 13th
 - June 3rd
 - July 8th
- Major Action Without Accessible Record
 - Notes that on May 13th, the commission adopted Resolution 2026-19, which:
 - Commits the county toward a \$1.22 billion bond with Palomas.
 - Commits the county to acquire land, easements, and rights-of-way.
 - The vote was public, but the record was not available for minutes.
 - June 3rd:
 - Held entirely in closed sessions to discuss acquisition of real property.
 - States that no public records (minutes) exist for that meeting.
- Requests / Action Items to Commission
 - Publish the May 13th, June 3rd, and July 8th minutes.
 - Amend June 24th minutes to:
 - Clearly state what was purchased, from whom, for how much, and with what water rights details, in compliance with law.
 - Do not advance the Palomas bond ordinance until:
 - The record is complete.
 - The record is published.
 - Notice is proven to the public.
- Documentation
 - States he has preserved dated copies of the County's website throughout, documenting when items were and were not posted.
 - Emphasizes he is only asking the commission to follow its own resolutions and state law.

Caycee Jo Ortiz- Torrance County Resident

- 13 years old
- Fifth-generation rancher
- Family ranch next to Moriarty Airport

Key Points & Concerns:

- Connection to the Land
 - Describes the ranch as:
 - "Not just dirt or open space," but home, animals, work, memories, and future.
 - Family participates in USDA conservation programs:
 - Protects land and wildlife while raising cattle.
 - States that ranching and conservation go hand in hand, and that the USDA recognizes them as good stewards of the land.
- Impact of Project Mars
 - Argues that taking the ranch for Project Mars:
 - Would destroy the habitat and way of life the family has worked to protect.

- Undermines the balance of feeding America while conserving land, water, and wildlife.
- Questions for the Commission
 - Requests honest answers to specific questions:
 - What is Project Mars?
 - How much land would it require?
 - How much water and electricity would it need?
 - What risks would it bring?
 - Why is a family ranch being considered when families are still living and working there?
- Future Generations
 - Asks whether there will be enough water and land for her and other children to:
 - Continue ranching.
 - Maintain the family legacy.
 - Emphasizes that:
 - Once land is taken, it cannot simply be reclaimed.
 - Once ranching families are pushed out, that way of life may be gone forever.
- Appeal to Commissioners
 - Urged commissioners to stand with local people and to:
 - Protect homes, ranches, churches, water, wildlife, and the local way of life.
 - Ensure every question is answered and every voice is heard before land is taken.

Ernest Ortiz- Torrance County Resident

Focus: Nature of Project Mars; candidate involvement; fairness and transparency in information sharing.

Key Points & Concerns:

- Rumors & Initial Contact
 - About a week before contact from Stephanie Reynolds, heard rumors that Mr. McCall was inquiring about land for a ballistic manufacturing training site near Moriarty Airport.
 - About a week later, Reynolds approached and referred to the effort as “Project Mars”.
- Confusion Over Project Type
 - Asks directly: What is Project Mars:
 - A ballistic manufacturing center, or
 - A data center?
- Reference for Candidate T. J. Holt
 - Quotes Mr. T. J. Holt (candidate) from social media, where Holt allegedly stated:
 - Project Mars is not a data center (unlike Project Jupiter).
 - It is a possible defense manufacturing contract the state economic development department is exploring.
 - It is not guaranteed this project will land in New Mexico.

- The commission has “no appetite” for a data center; state may consider a moratorium on data centers.
- Ernest’s questions:
 - How did Mr. Holt obtain this level of information?
 - Did Holt sign a non-disclosure agreement?
 - Was he informed by the commission, and if so, why him and not others?
 - Were other candidates offered the same briefings or access?
 - Is Holt being “put up to this” and “whose puppet is he”?
- Core Concern
 - Questions whether Holt truly represents Torrance County or is simply the “next pawn in the game”.
 - Implicitly raises concern about back-channel communication, political favoritism, and selective disclosure of project information.

Andy Chavez- Torrance County Resident

Key Points & Concerns:

- Critique of Commissioners
 - States that commissioners are failing to serve Torrance County residents.
 - Accuses them of:
 - Lining their own pockets.
 - Acting primarily in their own interest, not the community’s.
- Water & Landfill Issues
 - Notes that:
 - The county landfill cannot get sufficient water to operate correctly.
 - At the same time, there is discussion of a project that would use “gallons and gallons of water every day.”
 - Sees this as a misalignment of priorities and poor management.
- Historical Comment by a Commissioner
 - References for a prior statement by a commissioner who allegedly said:
 - He didn’t care that the area was running out of water, because his way of life mattered more.
 - Uses this to illustrate what he views as a pattern of disregard for community water needs.
- Support for Ranchers
 - Praises ranchers and agricultural families:
 - States that ranchers provide meat and educational opportunities for kids to learn ranching and farming.
 - Emphasizes that residents like Kim, Ernie, and others are not doing anything wrong, and are vital to the community.
- Call to Action
 - Calls on the community to stand up.
 - Advocates for removing “corrupt people” from the board of commissioners.
 - Positions the issue as one of accountability, transparency, and basic service to the community.

~Break at 9:25AM Due to technical difficulties

~Returned at 9:39AM

Annette P. Luna- Torrance County Resident

- Lifelong Torrance County resident (ranching family)
 - Expressed deep concern about:
 - Water scarcity across the county:
 - Mountainair hauling from Willard daily
 - People hauling water to McIntosh
 - Moriarty struggling to secure additional water rights for subdivisions (Sunset Acres, Wallen Complex, Homestead)
 - Strain on existing services: solid waste issues already affecting residents.
 - Loss of rural character and fear of becoming a non-rural community.
 - Emphasized:
 - As a registered voter, she feels commissioners are not looking at all residents, only a small group with growth potential.
 - Strong need for truth, transparency, and public information on “Project Mars.”
 - If the project is “such a good thing” for Moriarty/Torrance County, people should be fully informed.

Jerri Pohl - Torrance County Resident

Key Points

- Background on EMWT
 - Stated that in 2014, Torrance County became one of five parties that signed the EMWT (regional intercity water system) Certificates of Association.
 - Explained that the agreement granted EMWT broad authority to:
 - Hire employees.
 - Retain consultants and engineers.
 - Construct and operate the water system.
- Concern Over Executive Director Position
 - Questioned why Torrance County alone is now considering funding an Executive Director under a three-year contract.
 - Argued that the cost would fall on county taxpayers while primarily benefiting one subdivision.
 - Said this is inequitable because all five original parties shared responsibility under the 2014 agreement.
- History of EMWT Operations
 - Noted that for the past 12 years, EMWT has been operated by volunteers.
 - Said the volunteer board acquired failing water systems despite having very limited financial resources.
- County Financial Concerns
 - Stated the county has already spent nearly \$250,000 to purchase water rights for the system.
 - Expressed concern that taxpayers are now being asked to also fund an Executive Director's salary.

- Suggested this creates an unfair financial burden on Torrance County taxpayers.
- Recommendation
 - Recommended that all five parties that signed the 2014 Certificates of Association revisit the agreement and fulfill their original responsibilities.
 - Believing the current arrangement is unfair, presents conflicts of interest, and appears set up for failure.
- Government Transparency
 - Addressed reports of closed meetings related to potential economic development projects.
 - Challenged the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) as justification for withholding information.
 - Asserted that under New Mexico's Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA):
 - Government records are governed by state law.
 - The Legislature—not private NDAs—determines which records may be withheld.
 - Private contracts cannot override New Mexico's public transparency laws.

Action/Request

- Asked commissioners to:
 - Reevaluate the 2014 EMWT agreement with all participating entities.
 - Consider the financial fairness of hiring an Executive Director.
 - Ensure compliance with New Mexico public records and transparency laws regarding economic development discussions.

Kyle Metzger (rancher, family land borders Ortiz ranch)- Torrance County Resident

- They want to pass ranch down to children but fears the project could prevent that.
- Stated Torrance County is agriculture-based and “it’s a shame what’s going on.”
- Objected to “top-secret closed-door meetings”:
 - If the project is good for the county, ask why the public isn’t told the truth.
 - Said commissioners are not doing their job if they are not being transparent.

Onecimo Romero (resident & business owner)- Torrance County Resident

- Voiced opposition to Project Mars, pending more information.
- Criticized commissioners (particularly Mr. McCall and Mr. Schwebach):
 - Said they appeared distracted (on phones) while people were speaking.
 - Asked them to show the same respect the public shows them.
 - Reminded them they were elected to represent people who are emotional but engaged because they care.
- Primary ask: Respectful listening and engagement with the public.

Donna Romero- Torrance County Resident

- Asked repeatedly: “Why?”
 - Why is long-held ranch land “being threatened to be taken away”?
 - Why is there so little transparency and so few answers after months of concern?
- Stressed:

- If there's nothing to hide, there should be transparency.
- Commissioners have their own ranches and businesses; she requested they treat other families' land and businesses as they would their own.
- Cited data center impacts in other states (Texas, Virginia):
 - Large footprints increased electric bills (\$100 → \$500–\$700/month).
 - Heavy water use and broad community opposition.
- Asked commissioners to support the rural agricultural community and protect water.

Francisco Romero- Torrance County Resident

- Thanked Kim for sharing information; said without her they would know nothing about Project Mars.
- Said residents want straight answers and truth about what is being planned “in our backyard.”
- Stated they will not simply turn their backs and let the project go forward without clarity.

Leanne Tapia (former County Commissioner)- Torrance County Resident

- Expressed concern over an “attitude of arrogance” at the commission table.
- Key points:
 - Public officials are elected to serve, not dismiss, the public.
 - Citizens who attend and speak deserve respectful listening, even in disagreement.
 - Transparency, humility, and accountability are essential for good government.
 - Respect for the public is a responsibility, not an option.
- Criticized:
 - The two-minute public comment limit, saying it prevents residents from feeling heard.
 - Commissioners are paid to be there and should not curtail input because “they have places to be.”
- Called for:
 - Rebuilding trust via open dialogue and courtesy/professionalism.

Dr. James Stevens (resident, PhD chemist, Planning & Zoning Board member)

- Background:
 - Member, Torrance County Planning & Zoning Board, functioning like administrative judges on land-use matters.
 - Qualified as expert in chemistry by a federal judge.
 - Member of the U.S. National Academy of Science and Engineering, advising the President and Congress on technical issues.
- Initial concern:
 - Rumor of a \$1.2 billion bond potentially placing \$75,000+ debt per person, \$300,000+ per family of four — called it excessive for such a small population.
- On Project Mars & ballistics:

- Has extensive experience with propellants and explosives.
- Identified several risks:
 - High-nitrogen compounds: dangerous to manufacture, require toxic precursors (e.g., concentrated nitric acid).
 - Waste disposal: risk of toxic chemicals leaching into soil and water.
 - Elevated nitrogen in water is linked to cancer and thyroid disease.
 - Potential use of depleted uranium in projectiles:
 - Highly effective ballistically, but radioactive and hazardous.
 - Stated it is possible to do such work safely, but only with:
 - Rigorous review by qualified experts.
 - Strict controls on disposal and environmental protection.
- Key questions to commission:
 - Is this a federal project beyond county control?
 - Will it come before Planning & Zoning?
 - What is the formal process and timeline?
- Requested clarity and the opportunity for P&Z to review if the project progresses.
- Later additional comment by Dr. Stevens
 - Shared prior experience living near a propellant and ballistics facility that was operated safely.
 - Describe:
 - Operations in heavily reinforced concrete bunkers (~10-ft thick walls).
 - Minimal noise and external impact.
 - Emphasized:
 - People often imagine atomic-bomb-like explosions, but modern design can be safe if expert-designed and regulated.
 - Any unacceptable level of explosion risk would be unacceptable for Torrance County.

Jack Bryan (farmer from Stanley, north of Moriarty)

- Shared experience with water being diverted and wasted (erosion control at windmills) instead of for drinking.
- Concerned about:
 - Reported 2,500 acres of water being “given” to the project.
 - Whether all those wells are truly producing at claimed levels.
- Demanded:
 - Metering from source to project.
 - Full accountability on how much water is being allocated and why.
- Stated he will “fight you night and day” on this issue.

~Zoom~

Tracey Master- Torrance County Resident

- Agreed with others that transparency is lacking, and added specific examples:
 - Fairgrounds ribbon cutting:

- Not meaningfully advertised to the public.
- Only a quorum notice on the county calendar; no Facebook post.
- Agenda Item 8E (P-card purchase):
 - Language softened from “unauthorized purchase” to generic “purchase made prior to entering a purchase order.”
 - Historically, unauthorized purchases required formal non-conforming purchase notices with full explanation.
 - Only documentation in packet: a Walmart receipt for refreshments, with no justification or budget line reference.
 - Requested the item be tabled until proper documentation is provided.
- Reclassification of Finance Director:
 - HR assistants pay change was fully detailed; Finance Director reclassification had no public mention of pay increase.
 - When she asked by email, she was told it was already in the budget; she argued it should still be explicitly discussed on record.
- Executive session on agenda:
 - Listed without required statutory language.
 - Asked whether commission planned to go into executive session and urged full legal compliance.
- Request: County “go back to being transparent” and provide the public with full information.

Karrie Cox Romero- Torrance County Resident

- Resident of southern Santa Fe County.
- Stated that she draws groundwater from the Estancia Basin, giving her a personal interest in Project Mars.
- Identified herself as a lobbyist with the New Mexico Legislature and noted her experience with large industrial projects.

Key Points

- Interest in Project Mars
 - Thanked the Commission for the opportunity to participate in the discussion.
 - Said she has learned from the meeting and plans to continue listening as more information becomes available.
- Concerns About Project Classification
 - Explained that, through her legislative work, she has observed that some large industrial projects are not initially presented to the public as data centers but are later identified as such.
 - Clarified that she does not know whether Project Mars is a data center, but believes additional information is needed.
- Water Supply Questions
 - Requested clarification regarding the project's water usage, including:
 - Whether it will use brackish water or fresh groundwater.
 - The anticipated volume of water consumption.
- Electrical Infrastructure Concerns

- Asked about the expected electrical demand the project would place on Central New Mexico Electric Cooperative (CNMEC).
- Noted that the Corona area is already experiencing significant electrical capacity challenges.
- Questioned whether the existing infrastructure can realistically support the additional load.

Action/Request

- Requested greater transparency and additional information regarding:
 - The nature of Project Mars.
 - Its anticipated water source and consumption.
 - Its electrical demand and impacts on existing utility infrastructure.
- Indicated she would continue following the discussion as more details become available.

Chairman Ryan Schwebach

- Clarifications on Project Mars:
 - Asserted: “Project Mars is not a data center.”
 - Stated that no formal information has been publicly shared because:
 - The project is extremely preliminary.
 - No appearance yet on the commission agenda.
 - Said a few residents who called or emailed him received the same information privately.
- On process & origin:
 - The County Manager was first approached; Commissioner McCall was designated to represent the county.
 - AREA (Albuquerque Regional Economic Alliance), not the county, was approached by the State Economic Development Department about a client seeking state trust land.
 - The State Land Office identified possible parcels in Torrance and Sandoval Counties.
- On project features as presented:
 - Low-water-use manufacturing facility, not AI, not a data center.
 - Water use is limited to restrooms & hand-washing (comparable to a school or shopping center).
 - Estimated 300+ full-time jobs:
 - Ranging from janitorial and blue-collar to higher-paid white-collar roles.
- On closed meetings and NDAs:
 - Asserted no illegal executive sessions have been held on Project Mars.
 - Said any closed-door sessions:
 - Were properly noticed and recorded in minutes.
 - Were unrelated to this project.
 - Invited skeptics to use IPRA and other legal mechanisms if they believe violations occurred.
- On economic development philosophy:
 - Emphasized:
 - The county needs jobs, especially to keep:
 - Schools viable

- Emergency services funded
 - Young people from leaving the area.
- Very few agriculturalists can support their operations without off-farm income.
- Stated he is obligated to explore any job-creating opportunity that might fit:
 - Rural character
 - Water constraints
 - Power and transportation infrastructure.
- Acknowledged social media has likely damaged the project's prospects:
 - Believes companies monitor public reaction and may walk away.
- On public input:
 - Encouraged residents to:
 - Provide specific feedback on what kind of economic development they want.
 - Recognize that many non-farming residents also need employment opportunities.

Commissioner Kevin McCall

- Role & timeline:
 - Confirmed he was the commissioner designated to lead initial discussions, as more than one commissioner at a meeting risks Open Meetings Act violations.
 - Timeline:
 - Mid-April: AREA contacted by State Economic Development Department about a potential tenant for state trust land.
 - State Economic Development coordinated with State Land Office to identify sites in Torrance and Sandoval Counties.
 - Two meetings attended by McCall:
 - Both included the County Manager, County Attorney, and the Central New Mexico Electric Co-op president.
- Project characteristics as conveyed to him:
 - 300–400 jobs, approx. 60% blue collar, 40% white collar.
 - Not a data center, low water use, manufacturing-type facility.
 - Not related to Project Ranger/Castilian in Sandoval County, although that project put New Mexico on the radar for aerospace/national defense.
 - One of two counties (Torrance & Sandoval) and three states (NM, AZ, UT) are under consideration.
- On NDAs and communication:
 - Explained NDAs are standard in economic development:
 - Cited example where a U.S. senator leaked Project Ranger from Arizona, causing it to relocate.
 - This history drives strict confidentiality initially.
 - Said he asked explicitly how to share information with fellow commissioners:
 - Was told to do so through the County Manager, given NDA constraints.
 - Expressed frustration at being called “liar,” “greasy,” “lining pockets”:
 - Denied personal financial benefit.
 - Emphasized the project, it “fell into our laps” the county did not solicit it.

- On public assurances:
 - Reiterate:
 - If it became a data center or high-water-use project, the answer would be no.
 - Any project must still move through Planning & Zoning and public processes.
 - Acknowledged:
 - The project may already be “jaded” enough that New Mexico is likely no longer favored.

Commissioner Linda Jaramillo

- Representing District communities (Willard, Mountainair, etc.), lifelong resident:
 - Said she was originally told the project was “top secret” and:
 - Was not included in early information to avoid creating a quorum.
 - Expressed sympathy with public concerns:
 - County is “dying”—towns are shrinking, businesses closing.
 - But rural, agricultural way of life must be preserved.
 - Strong stance on transparency:
 - Does not like being kept in the dark.
 - Believes the public should know what is going on in government.
 - When constituents ask about Project Mars, she has had to reply: “I really don’t know... I know it’s not an AI center, but that’s all I know.”
 - On water:
 - Stressed water crisis in the county.
 - Cited wind towers:
 - Originally claimed no effect on infrastructure.
 - Now require water hauling and dust control, contrary to initial assurances.
 - Pressed for specific water usage figures for Project Mars.
 - On communication:
 - Noted she has not had substantive conversations with other commissioners outside of formal meetings since taking office.
 - Call for full public disclosure if the project continues.

County Attorney – Michael Garcia

- Present at the initial meeting with AREA and State Economic Development.
- Summary of what he heard:
 - A 300–400 job professional, high-paying operation.
 - Low-intensity water and power use compared to many other industries.
 - “Absolutely, categorically not a data center.”
- On land:
 - Stated the land in question is state trust land, not private fee land.
 - Any grazing lease impacts would involve negotiations and compensation, not condemnation.
- From broader perspective:

- Called Project Mars potentially “an opportunity of a lifetime” for Torrance County.
- As an Air Force veteran, expressed strong support for national defense-related projects.
- Compared secrecy to Walmart in Edgewood:
 - Corporations conceal details to prevent land prices from spiking and to protect competitive positioning.

Kim Ortiz- Torrance County Resident

- Whether AREA has links to Homeland Security or DoD.
- Whether, given how data centers often enter communities under misleading labels, commissioners might later appear to have misled the public—even if they were themselves misled.
- Whether preliminary actions (like NDAs, zoning/plan groundwork) are already setting the stage before the public can meaningfully object.
- Whether commissioners would personally give up their own land for such a project.
- Environmental and land stewardship arguments:
 - Emphasized local conservation efforts on state trust lands:
 - Habitat for ferruginous hawks, golden eagles, sandhill cranes.
 - Compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and related protections.
 - Warned that converting these lands to industrial use, especially if ballistics-related, could:
 - Drive out existing residents.
 - Undermine the agricultural and wildlife-based identity of Torrance County.
- Commission responses:
 - Schwebach:
 - Repeated that no executive sessions have been held regarding Project Mars.
 - Clarified:
 - Commissioner McCall and staff represent the county, not the private company.
 - Meetings so far are strictly preliminary fact-finding.

County Attorney- Michale Garcia:

- Noted that any archeological and environmental assessments must be completed before final project decisions—those issues are “built into” the process.
- Ortiz insisted:
 - The public does not want the project to proceed to next steps.
 - People can work elsewhere (Albuquerque) and commute, while preserving the local environment.
 - Past county record on oversight and enforcement (e.g., landfill violations, deteriorated greenhouses) is poor; she fears the same pattern will be repeated.

Technical Reassurance – Dr. James Stevens (follow-up)

- Offered a “level-setting” comment:
 - Lived in a community with propellant/ballistic testing done safely.
 - Facilities used thick concrete bunkers (~10 ft walls) to contain blasts:
 - Minimal noise, negligible external impact.
 - Emphasized:
 - It is possible to conduct such operations safely, but expert review and design are essential.
 - Large uncontrolled explosions or radiation hazards would not be acceptable and must be ruled out.
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5. DEPARTMENT UPDATES:

- a. ANIMAL CONTROL:** Department Update on the completion of work related to state appropriation 5-J3189 secured by the County Commission and our Roadhouse representatives for substantial repairs to the Torrance County Animal Shelter.

Danette Langdon- Animal Services Director

- Shelter Facility Upgrades
 - Majority of work on kennels completed:
 - Patching existing kennels due to original material constraints.
 - Floors redone.
 - Industrial backyard fence installed.
 - Added 6 new outdoor kennels, nearly doubling capacity for dogs.
 - Reconfiguring one kennel area into a quarantine space to address prior veterinary inspection findings.
 - Contract with Western Trails Animal Hospital
 - Annual veterinary services agreement for shelter animals.
 - Costs increased due to higher sterilization prices; total contract amount increased to align with:
 - Carroll Petrie grant (increased from \$20,000 to \$60,000).
 - Legal review completed; contract signed by veterinarian.
 - Contract with Dr. Crystal Hutzler (Supervising Veterinarian)
 - Annual professional services contract allowing:
 - Site inspections of the shelter.
 - Oversight of drug handling since shelter uses drugs under her license.
-

- Contract remains substantially unchanged from prior years.
- Contract with Pharmacist Kathleen Wynos-West (Controlled Substances)
 - Required quarterly inspections of how controlled substances are:
 - Stored
 - Tracked
 - Used
 - Same contract terms as previous years, renewed to remain compliant.
- Spay/Neuter Policy
 - All animals leaving the shelter must be sterilized or have a confirmed sterilization appointment.
 - For:
 - Reclaims/adoptions paid from a county fund and reimbursed by owners/adopters.
 - Rescues (proactive spay/neuter): covered by grant funds (e.g., Carroll Petrie), making animals more desirable to rescues.
 - Shelter practice exceeds state statute on sterilization requirements.

b. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: Department Update: National Night Out to be held on August 11, 2026, from 5:00pm to 8:00pm at the Torrance County Fair Grounds.

Samantha O'Dell Emergency Manager

- National Night Out – Second Annual Event
 - Date/Time: August 11, 5–8 p.m.
 - Location: Torrance County Fairgrounds, concurrent with County Fair.
 - Participation:
 - 24 agencies confirmed, with more expressing interest.
 - Free food to be provided; all activities free to the public.
 - Layout:
 - Booths between the two main fairground buildings (covered area).
 - Large emergency/service vehicles south of the new building.

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **COMMISSION:** Request Approval of July 8, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes of the Board of County Commissioners.

- Chairman Schwebach moved to approve.
- Commissioner Jaramillo requested tabling, stating she had just received complete minutes and had not yet reviewed them.
- Without a second, the motion died; by default, the minutes will be carried to the next meeting.

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve Commission Meeting minutes; No second motion.

- Motion Tabled
-

7. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. **FINANCE:** Request Approval of Payables with a Date Range of July 1, 2026, through July 15, 2026.

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve Payables; Seconded by **Commissioner McCall**.

Roll Call Vote:

- **Schwebach** – Yes
 - **McCall** – Yes
 - **Jaramillo** – Yes
 - Motion Carried
-

8. APPROVALS/ACTION ITEM

- a. **ANIMAL CONTROL:** Request approval of Veterinary Services Agreement with Western Trails Animal Hospital for veterinary care for animals.
- b. **ANIMAL CONTROL:** Request approval of Professional Services Contract with Dr. Krystle Hutsel for inspections of the shelter.
- c. **ANIMAL CONTROL:** Request approval of Professional Services Contract with Kathleen West, RPh for inspections of controlled substances.
-

Danette Langdon, Animal Services Director

- Veterinary Services – Western Trails Animal Hospital
 - Annual contract renewal with price increases for sterilization and other services.
 - Contract total increased to align with a Carroll Petrie grant (up to \$60,000, previously \$20,000).
 - Legal has reviewed; veterinarian has signed.
 - Policy:
 - All shelter animals leaving for adoption or reclaim must be sterilized or have sterilization appointments.
 - Grant funds pay for proactive spay/neuter for animals going to rescues, making them more adaptable.
 - County funds are used for adoption/reclaim surgeries but are reimbursed by adopters/owners.
- Supervising Veterinarian – Dr. Crystal Hutzel
 - Annual professional services contract renewed.
 - Role:
 - Supervising vet for drug purchasing and shelter oversight.
 - Authorized to inspect the shelter and drug usage/storage as needed and be compensated.
- Supervising Pharmacist – Kathleen Wynos, RPh
 - Annual professional services contract renewed.
 - Role:
 - Required quarterly inspections of controlled substances for compliance.
- Shelter Facility Update
 - Most kennel repair work was completed (patching older materials where needed).
 - Floors completed; industrial backyard fence installed.
 - Added six outside kennels, nearly doubling dog capacity.
 - Converting one kennel into a quarantine area to address prior veterinary report findings.
 - Shelter is re-opening and ramping back up after being closed for repairs.

- a) **Motion: Chairman Schwebach** motioned to approve; Seconded by **Commissioner Jaramillo**.

Roll Call Vote:

- **Schwebach** – Yes
- **McCall** – Yes
- **Jaramillo** – Yes
- Motion Carried

- b) **Motion: Chairman Schwebach** motioned to approve; Seconded by **Commissioner McCall**.

Roll Call Vote:

- **Schwebach** – Yes
- **McCall** – Yes
- **Jaramillo** – Yes
- Motion Carried

- c) **Motion: Chairman Schwebach** motioned to approve; Seconded by **Commissioner Jaramillo**.

Roll Call Vote:

- **Schwebach** – Yes
- **McCall** – Yes
- **Jaramillo** – Yes
- Motion Carried

-
- d. **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT:** Request ratification of 2026 State homeland Security Grant Program application.

Samantha O'Dell- Emergency Manager

- submitted a **state Homeland Security Grant Program application** under tight timeframe (1 week).
- Manager approved submission in advance; Commission **ratified** the application.
- No local match is required.
- Application preparation involved **multiple agency meetings** and substantial documentation.

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve; Seconded by **Commissioner McCall**.
Roll Call Vote:

- **Schwebach** – Yes
 - **McCall** – Yes
 - **Jaramillo** – Yes
 - Motion Carried
-

- e. **MANAGER:** Request approval to pay 7/14/2026 purchase with P-Card in the amount \$136.57 for a purchase made prior to entering a purchase order into Tyler.

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve; Seconded by **Commissioner McCall**.
Roll Call Vote:

- **Schwebach** – Yes
 - **McCall** – Yes
 - **Jaramillo** – Yes
 - Motion Carried
-

- f. **MANAGER:** Request for a special meeting for July 30, 2026, at 9:00am.

Stephanie Reynolds- County Manager

Special Meeting – Budget & Quarterly Report

- Need to approve:
 - Final budget for upcoming fiscal year.
 - 4th quarter report.
 - July 8, 2026 minutes.
 - Scheduling:
 - After discussion, Commission agreed on a special meeting:
 - Date: Wednesday, July 29, 2026
 - Time: 9:00 a.m.
 - Agenda to include:
 - Final budget approval.
-

- 4th quarter report.
- July 8 meeting minutes.

Motion: Meeting scheduled

g. MANAGER: Request approval to be fiscal agent for EMWT.

Stephanie Reynolds

- Explained that the agenda item was intentionally written in very general terms because detailed information from EMWT had not been available when the agenda was prepared.
- Clarified that supporting documentation had since been received, but only that morning, after the agenda packet had already been finalized.
- Noted that because the details arrived late, they were not included in the agenda materials.
- Commissioner/Board Questions
 - Asked which grant the request was associated with and requested the grant number.
 - Staff responded that:
 - The document did not include a grant number.
 - The highlighted portions of the document also lacked the necessary information.
 - Staff did not know which specific grant the request was related to.
- Fiscal Agent Discussion
 - Staff explained that the request was asking the county to serve as the fiscal agent because funding from the Water Trust Board would be directed to EMWT, requiring a fiscal agent.
 - A board member asked for the funding amount.
 - Staff confirmed that:
 - No funding amount was provided in the document.
 - The document was essentially boilerplate language without the project-specific details.

Key Concerns Raised

- Missing grant number.
- Missing grant amount.
- Lack of sufficient project-specific information to make an informed decision.
- Supporting documentation was incomplete and received too late for proper board review.

Decision / Direction

- The board agreed to:
 - Obtain the exact grant information.
 - Include the grant number, funding amount, and all supporting details.
 - Place the item on a future special meeting agenda once complete information is available.

Motion: No motion Just direction

h. PLANNING and ZONING: Request approval of Special Waste Disposal, Inc. annual renewal of Solid Waste District Permit.

Don Goen, Planning and Zoning Director.

- Facility:
 - Located near Liberty Valley Road, east of Mountainair.
 - Handles asbestos and contaminated soil remediation (e.g., old fuel tank sites).
 - Inspections:
 - State environmental inspections were clear.
 - One minor violation found by the company itself:
 - A missing hauler's license number on paperwork, which state had missed for 20 years; now corrected.
 - Questions from Commissioner Jaramillo:
 - How long has facility existed? ~30 years.
 - Acreage? Approximately 20 acres (Don added a disclaimer).
 - Remaining life? Another ~20 years of operational capacity.
 - Water wells nearby? None in immediate danger of contamination.
 - Action:
-

- Renewal approved (also previously approved by P&Z Board).

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve; Seconded by **Commissioner Jaramillo**.
Roll Call Vote:

- **Schwebach** – Yes
 - **McCall** – Yes
 - **Jaramillo** – Yes
 - Motion Carried
-

- i. **SHERIFF:** Request approval of grant agreement received from the forest service in the amount of \$5,000.00 for the overtime costs of forest service patrols, 23-LE11030300-057.

Reecie (Sheriff's Office).

- Purpose:
 - Covers overtime costs for patrols supporting Forest Service:
 - Illegal wood-cutting.
 - Fire prevention/enforcement.
- Notes:
 - \$5,000 is not enough to cover all costs, but “it’s what they give us” and helps show presence.

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve; Seconded by **Commissioner McCall**.
Roll Call Vote:

- **Schwebach** – Yes
 - **McCall** – Yes
 - **Jaramillo** – Yes
 - Motion Carried
-

9. ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION

- a. **ROADS:** Request discussion and approval of resolution amending the Road policy for the adoption of county-maintained roads.

Chairman Schwebach

The Chair opened the discussion by explaining that after further legal review, staff determined that the County did not have an ordinance governing this issue, only an existing road policy. Because of this, legal counsel drafted a resolution rather than an ordinance amendment, which would accomplish the same objective with less complexity.

The Chair explained that the amendment primarily revises Section 3, Subparagraph 5, concerning reclassification standards, noting that while some wording changes were made throughout the section, the most significant change was contained in the final paragraph.

The Chair emphasized that the purpose of the amendment was to provide the Commission with greater flexibility to address long-standing residential road issues.

Commissioner Jaramillo

Commissioner Jaramillo asked whether the language stating that roads must meet minimum County standards before being accepted meant that property owners would still have to improve roads before the County could assume maintenance.

After legal counsel explained the new exception, Commissioner Jaramillo sought clarification that the amendment essentially changed the policy by allowing roads serving ten residences within one-quarter mile to qualify for County maintenance.

Commissioner Jaramillo also asked whether the Commission had previously possessed the authority to approve roads for maintenance and questioned whether accepting these roads would obligate the County to rebuild them to County specifications.

Following additional explanation from legal counsel, Commissioner Jaramillo acknowledged that the amendment simply expanded the Commission's flexibility without creating a requirement to reconstruct roads.

County Attorney Michael Garcia

The County Attorney explained that the amendment creates a specific exception to the County's existing road acceptance standards.

He clarified that:

- Existing policies remain in place for newly constructed roads.
- The new language allows the Commission to consider roads serving ten residences within one-quarter mile even if those roads do not currently meet County construction standards.

- The amendment gives the Commission broad discretion to decide whether or not to accept a qualifying road.

He stated that the Commission would not be obligated to accept every qualifying road and intentionally drafted the language to provide "as much flexibility as possible."

The County Attorney further explained that if funding was unavailable or Commissioners believed another road deserved higher priority, the Commission could decline to accept a road even if it met the residential threshold.

Road Department Superintendent Leonard Lujan

Road Department Manager Leonard explained that the amendment was intended to solve a practical problem the County has faced for many years.

He stressed repeatedly that:

- Roads accepted under this policy would not have to be rebuilt to County standards.
- The Road Department's goal would simply be to blade roads, improve drainage where necessary, and provide safe ingress and egress for residents.

Leonard explained that the amendment gives the Commission authority to approve maintenance on existing residential roads that previously could not qualify under current policy.

He stated that once accepted:

- these roads would be maintained,
- but they would be placed behind existing County-maintained roads in maintenance priority.

Leonard used an example comparing a road serving a single ranch to another serving approximately 400 residents, explaining that roads serving larger populations would naturally receive more immediate attention when resources allowed.

Leonard also noted that maintenance costs vary significantly because every road is different.

Some roads require only blading, while others may need:

- drainage work,
- culverts,
- grading,
- or additional improvements.

For that reason, he said assigning a single cost estimate before evaluating individual roads was difficult.

Commissioner (Discussion on Fairness Between Districts)

One Commissioner raised concerns that road funding should be distributed fairly among all Commission districts.

The Commissioner suggested that as roads are selected under the new policy, projects should not all occur within one district and that every district should receive consideration.

The discussion concluded that while equal mileage may not be practical because each district has different needs, the Commission agreed funding decisions should be fair rather than strictly equal.

Chairman Schwebach – Budget Discussion

The Chair proposed connecting the new policy directly to an annual budget.

He stated that once the allocated funding was exhausted, no additional roads would be accepted until the following fiscal year.

The Chair explained that budgeting the program would:

- establish clear financial limits,
- allow the Commission to prioritize projects annually,
- prevent the County from assuming obligations beyond available funding.

Road Department Superintendent Leonard Lujan – Cost Estimates

When the Chair requested estimated maintenance costs, Leonard explained that providing an exact number was difficult because costs depend on each road's condition.

After further discussion, Leonard estimated:

- approximately \$2,500–\$3,000 per mile for one routine blading;
- roughly four maintenance cycles annually if needed;
- approximately \$12,000 per mile annually for routine maintenance without adding material.

The Chair suggested using \$15,000 per mile as a planning estimate to allow funding for occasional culverts or additional work.

Leonard agreed that estimate was reasonable.

Chairman Schwebach – Proposed Budget

Using Leonard's estimates, the Chair noted that approximately four miles of roads currently appeared to qualify under the new policy.

The Chair calculated that an annual budget of approximately \$60,000 would provide enough funding to begin addressing those roads.

Some Commissioners discussed funding levels closer to \$75,000, while others preferred \$60,000.

After discussion, the Commission generally agreed that \$60,000 annually was an appropriate starting point for budget planning.

County Attorney Michael Garcia – Funding Clarification

The County Attorney advised the Commission that the annual funding amount did not need to be included in the resolution because the resolution already states that road acceptance is subject to available funding.

He explained that funding decisions would instead occur during the annual budget adoption process.

Following that advice, the Chair withdrew his proposed amendment adding the budget amount directly into the resolution.

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve; Seconded by **Commissioner McCall**.

Roll Call Vote:

- **Schwebach** – Yes
- **McCall** – Yes
- **Jaramillo** – Yes
- Motion Carried

10. DISCUSSION/PRESENTATION

a. CLERK'S REPORT

Sylvia Chavez – Torrance County Clerk

- Public Participation & Outreach:
 - Thanked the public for attending and staying for the full meeting, not just their agenda item.
- Willard Address Change Outreach:
 - USPS changes: Willard residents now receive mail at physical addresses instead of P.O. boxes.

- Clerk's, Assessor's, and Treasurer's offices held an outreach event in Willard to update:
 - Mailing addresses for tax bills and notices of valuation.
 - Voter registrations, to ensure accurate precincts and mailing.
- Encouraged anyone with address changes to update voter registration to continue receiving election information.
- New Mexico Counties – Board of Directors Meeting:
 - Sylvia is the county's representative.
 - Upcoming meeting in Roosevelt County – August 6–7.
 - Focus will be legislative priorities.
 - Invited commissioners and managers to provide issues or requests they want raised on behalf of Torrance County.

b. MANAGER'S REPORT

Stephanie Reynolds– County Manager

- Job Posting:
 - One current vacancy: Tax Specialist I.
 - Additional postings anticipated soon.
- Fairgrounds Multi-Purpose Building – Ribbon Cutting:
 - Described event as well-attended and successful.
 - Building is beautiful and a major upgrade for the county.
- Delinquent Mobile Home Tagging Initiative – Treasurer's Update (on behalf of Treasurer):
 - Since February, mobile homes with delinquent taxes were tagged to spur payment.
 - Collections by month (delinquent mobile home accounts only):
 - Feb: \$30,819.43
 - Mar: \$78,010.55
 - Apr: \$46,717.22
 - May: \$29,940.09
 - Jun: \$27,156.25
 - Jul (to date): \$12,812.13

- Total collected: \$225,455.67
- Notes:
 - Represents significant new revenue from previously delinquent accounts.
 - Manager commended Treasurer's Office and especially staff member Miles Cherry for leading this effort.
- P-Card Purchase – Ribbon Cutting Refreshments (Item 8E):
 - Manager took full responsibility for mistakenly using P-card before entering a PO.
 - Purchase included fruit/vegetable trays, cookies, tea, lemonade for ribbon-cutting event (~\$136.57).
 - Explained:
 - Thought only receipts were required for P-card; now understands policy requires prior PO.
 - Acknowledged this as an “embarrassing” but important lesson.
 - Noted future events will be better publicized now that the Manager's Facebook page access has been restored.
 - Commission approved post-payment.

c. COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS:

1) Commissioner McCall, District 1

Commissioner McCall

- **Fairgrounds Project:**
 - Highlighted that the entire \$4.9 million cost of the new multi-purpose building came from state capital outlay, not county funds.
 - Thanks:
 - Current legislators who championed the project.
 - Former State Senator Greg Schmedes for earlier capital outlay contributions.
 - Describe the building:
 - ~10,800 square feet, fully air-conditioned, with restrooms.
 - A facility any county would be proud of.
- ~~Road Policy Resolution 2026-22:~~
 - Thanked fellow commissioners for adopting it.

- Believes it will:
 - Correct historical shortcomings in subdivision and road adoptions.
 - Provide relief to residents on long-neglected roads.
-

2) Commissioner Schwebach, District 2

Chairman Ryan Schwebach

- Reflection on Public Engagement:
 - Thanked those who attended and stayed for the entire meeting.
 - Encouraged continued involvement beyond single issues or social media campaigns.
 - On Role as Commissioner:
 - Stated his intent has always been “for the betterment of all the people” in the county.
 - Will continue to:
 - Evaluate all economic opportunities.
 - Consider water, power, roads, schools, and long-term viability.
 - Outlook:
 - Hopes future commissions will also carefully pursue sound opportunities.
 - Acknowledged:
 - Water is a major constraint, primary question in all projects.
 - County needs a shared vision of what kind of growth and jobs are acceptable.
-

3) Commissioner Jaramillo, District 3

Commissioner Linda Jaramillo

- **Community Events:**
 - July 9: Walk-through of fairgrounds with city council, Deputy Manager, and fair board – first view of new building.
 - July 9–10: Attended Rosary and Mass for Deacon Juan Lucero, father of County Assessor; Archbishop John Wester presided. Noted large community turnout.
 - July 14: Torrance County Fair Board meeting – discussed upcoming fair logistics.
 - July 15: Attended ribbon-cutting at fairgrounds.
 - Food Insecurity in Torrance County:
 - July 16: Participated in a listening session on food issues, hosted by Roadrunner Food Bank.
 - Identified three key local food pantries/warehouses:
 - Bethel Community Warehouse
-

- St. Vincent de Paul – Estancia Valley Catholic Parish
- Moriarty Church of the Nazarene
- Reported:
 - Increased demand due to cuts in Medicaid and supplemental food programs.
 - Complex logistics to secure sufficient food for families.
- Strongly encouraged donations and support for these organizations, praising those who help meet this basic human need.
- On Project Mars and County Role:
 - Reiterate:
 - She dislikes “top secret” approaches and being kept in the dark.
 - As an elected official, she must be able to answer constituents’ questions.
 - Government should be open, particularly about long-term land and water impacts.

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION-

None

12. CONSIDERATION OF ACTION(S)

None

13. Announcement of the next Board of County Commissioner’s Meeting:

August 12, 2026

Special Meeting July 29, 2029 at 9:00AM

14. SIGNING OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

15. ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to Adjourn; Seconded by **Commissioner Jaramillo.**

Roll Call Vote:

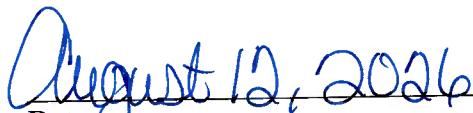
- **Schwebach** – Yes
 - **McCall** – Yes
 - **Jaramillo** – Yes
-

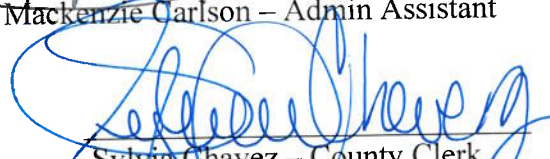
- Motion Carried

Meeting adjourned at 11:31AM


Ryan Schwebach – Chairman


Mackenzie Carlson – Admin Assistant


Date


Sylvia Chavez – County Clerk

The video and audio of this meeting are available upon request.