

Bernalillo County Commission Observer Report December 2023

The Bernalillo County Commission voted unanimously to put together a working group to try to unravel the problems at the Albuquerque/Bernalillo Air Quality Control Board. This parallels a resolution passed by the Albuquerque City Council.

You may remember that the Albuquerque City Council voted to remove the members of the Air Quality Board, the Mayor vetoed the resolution, and the City Council overrode the veto.

This was pretty confusing since the Air Quality Board was in the middle of public hearings to add an environmental justice element to permits issued by the board. The Air Quality Board went ahead with the public hearings, saying they had not officially received word of the dissolution of half of the board.

The Board is made up of both city and county appointees. The City Environmental Services Department does the air modeling and staff work for the board. The board is a contract between the City and the County, and is chartered to do rule making and issue permits for emissions by the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Department.

If the city decides to have an air quality control board run only by the city, it still would have to apply for permission to monitor Albuquerque air quality, make regulations and issue permits for emission from the New Mexico Environment Department.

If the county is excluded from the city air quality board, it would have to make a decision about whether to create the staff capacity to do air modeling, set up separate monitoring stations, and apply to the New Mexico Environment Department to regulate air quality in Bernalillo County. In the meantime, businesses who want to apply for an air quality permit might have to stand in line for a hearing at the state level, along with businesses from other parts of the state.

No matter what eventually happens, air quality permits needed by business are on an indefinite delay until some solution is reached.

The County Commission also voted unanimously to extend the gross receipts tax set aside for behavioral health for five years. This tax was enacted to build a county-wide behavioral health system after Governor Susanna Martinez dismantled the statewide mental health services system.