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City leaves utilities turned on

The lights are on, and there are periodic veteran's club activities, but there really isn't much else happening at the Ford Canyon Senior Center these days.

Gallup Assistant City Manager Jon DeYoung responded to questions put to the city about the closing of the Ford Canyon Senior Center located on Buena Vista Avenue.

"(The Ford Canyon Senior Center) was temporarily closed on Nov. 1 to finish the construction of the parking lot," DeYoung explained. "After the completion of the parking lot, we were not able to fill a few critical senior center positions to enable the city to provide the service level required by the state Non-Metro Area Agency at both centers."

DeYoung said the utilities at the 8,200-square-foot Ford Canyon Senior Center remain on and veterans services are still offered from the building. DeYoung did not specify what type of veteran services are offered.

Some questions about the closing of the Ford Canyon Senior Center arose when District 3 city council candidate Esco Chavez posed the closure inquiries at a news conference two weeks ago and called specifically to address Ford Canyon's closing.

"It still doesn't make a lot of sense to have that building closed," Chavez, a Gallup native and a

retired city parks and recreation director, said. “Nobody can believe that they (the city) want to keep it closed.”

DeYoung said the reason for the parking lot project was to fix a drainage problem. He said the total cost of that project was $314,000. DeYoung said the senior center building itself is in “good” condition and was given a good bill of health in an asset management survey. The parking lot also serves residents that utilize the neighboring Ford Canyon Park.

BUT THE LIGHTS ARE ON

To keep the utilities on is costing taxpayers around $500 per month, DeYoung said. Kimberly Ross-Toledo is the manager of both senior centers and Ross-Toledo reports to DeYoung.

None of DeYoung’s explanations sit well with José Esposito of Gallup, 83, who used to frequent the Ford Canyon Senior Center on a daily basis prior to its closure.

“I have spoken to some city people and they don’t much have a lot of answers about the closing and don’t know a lot about when the (Ford Canyon Senior Center) will open again,” Esposito said. “I was all but told to stop asking questions about it. I’m glad (Esco) is taking a stand on this.”

DeYoung said the city continues to work with the state on fiscal 2018 budgeting for both senior centers.

Gallup City Councilor Yogash Kumar, whose council district includes the Ford Canyon Senior Center, said he’s a fan of such centers, but long-term staffing is a problem at Ford Canyon. He said a program manager is needed along with a licensed CDL employee to work at Ford Canyon.

“I think there are a variety of reasons as to why people choose not to stay in that (Ford Canyon)

job a long time," Kumar said. "In the Ford Canyon case, most of the seniors that used to go to that center are now going to the north side center. From what I hear they like it and are happy with the variety of activities there."

"The state requires that specific levels of service be provided in order to continue to receive state and federal funding," DeYoung said. DeYoung explained that fiscal 2017 annual state funding for the centers is $144,486; federal funding is $191,037 and can only be used for food; local funding is $674,314.

"Basically, 64 percent of the senior budget is covered by the city of Gallup; 14 percent is covered by the state; 18 percent is covered by the feds and the rest we hope to get from consumer donations," DeYoung said.

Gallup is the sole municipality of its size in New Mexico that operates two senior centers.

The city's north side center is located at 607 N. Fourth St.

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