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Esco Chavez, the Gallup native, New Mexico State University graduate and the former executive director at Gallup's parks and recreation department, sees enormous potential in the Gallup Soccer Complex. It's the size of four official soccer fields and was once the talk-of-the-town by Gallup youth, but is barely used as of late, he says.

And there is a reason for its lack of use.

"This is a gem no matter how you look at it," Chavez said March 7, standing in front of the field along Sanostee Drive on the city's west side. "Look at this. Why isn't this field in use?"

Chavez recalls a time when players of all ages would practice various sports at the field, mostly soccer. The field is a stone's throw away from the city wastewater treatment plant – which carries its share of past controversies.

He said these days, though, the city seems to have "just let the place (Gallup Soccer Complex) go," saying a locked front gate at the field sends a "stay away" message to the general public.

It's taxpayer property and people deserve to know what's going on, Chavez said.

Chavez noted that the field contains concession stands and bathrooms, and is American Disabilities Association compliant and is big enough to be used for a variety of purposes.

“It’s a sad day in Gallup when something like this happens and nobody is doing anything about it,” Chavez said. “Somebody at the city has to step up.”

Current Gallup Parks and Recreation Director Vince Alonzo said the Gallup Soccer Complex hasn’t been consistently used in practically three years, hence the locked front gate.

Alonzo said the field contains prairie dog holes, which makes the field dangerous for folks who want to use it.

Prairie dogs are herbivorous and are a type of ground squirrel which feed on grass and other greenery-like substances. They multiply like rabbits and are very numerous around Gallup.

“The holes are a safety concern,” Alonzo said of the holes created by the prairie dogs. “We do go in and cover the holes, but from July through about October is when the majority of prairie dogs come out. You’re talking about a lot of holes.”

Chavez said the prairie dog holes have been an issue at the Gallup Soccer Complex ever since he commanded parks and recreation more than a decade ago. He said there is a Gallup soccer group that utilizes the field, but they can’t anymore because the city refuses to do anything about the holes. Representatives from the soccer group did not immediately return telephone call to the *Sun*.

Chavez and Alonzo believe turf is the answer.

“Yes, you can put artificial turf on the field,” Alonzo said. “You’re talking about $4 million to do that, more or less.”

Chavez said it looks like the Gallup Soccer Complex is going the way of the National Junior

High Finals Rodeo and New Mexico Cross Country Championship events went.

Gallup hosted the former for eight straight years up until about three years ago. Both of those events were held at Red Rock Park “back in the day,” Chavez said, adding, “They were very successful events. How’d the city let them get away?”

Continued Chavez, “We used to host both of those events – but now look,” he said. “It makes you wonder what the city is doing with our sporting events and our sports economics.”

Don McFall, 36, a Gallup resident the past two years and resident of the west side, said he runs near the Gallup Soccer Complex nearly everyday. Opening the complex would allow runners to stay away from the actual street.

“It would be nice to at least open up the field every now and then,” he said. “I haven’t talked to anyone about it, but I’m sure there are reasons as to why it isn’t open for people.”

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