

CITY RENEWS VET CENTER LEASE

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 31 March 2017 07:22



The Gallup City Council unanimously passed a management agreement related to the veterans center along West Maloney Avenue.

The action took place at the March 28 regular city meeting and was not met with opposition by council members or members of the community. City Attorney George Kozeliski introduced the matter to council members.

“Everything is the same in this agreement as per a previous agreement,” Kozeliski told council members. “It is a management agreement that needs your approval.”

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Kozeliski said the veterans center building, located at 204 W. Maloney Ave., used to be a fire station up until about three years ago.

“It was the old, closed north side fire station,” he said.

Joe Zecca, a retired U.S. Navy veteran, said renewing the management agreement allows vets a convenient place to meet. Zecca is a signee to the management document and is chairman of the Gallup Area Veterans Council, Inc.

“I think it’s a good thing that we have that building to meet at,” Zecca said. “I’m glad both sides agreed on this.”

Noting some history of the building, Kozeliski said the city owns the structure outright. He said the building was being used to store fire equipment and to house the fire marshal prior to the veterans occupying it. And the city fire marshal moved to another building near the Harold Runnels Swimming Pool Complex, Kozeliski noted.

“The mayor and council were looking for a place for the veterans to gather and it was decided that this would work,” Kozeliski said.

The agreement expires on June 30, 2019, or until a permanent place is found for veterans, the document reads.

Dave Cuellar, a Vietnam Veteran (U.S. Army) and retired police officer, who also sits on the veterans council, is a prominent member of the group Veterans Helping Veterans. This group has taken on the responsibility of opening the center’s doors each day and providing a safe haven for local vets.

Their biweekly meeting held on Fridays at Don Diego’s, usually attracts about 100-150 veterans from the area.

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He said having the center available at other times for meetings, gatherings and socializing has made a difference in countless lives.

“I am really grateful for the city providing us use of this building,” he said

Cuellar said the group rolls out the red carpet to families that need a nice place to have a reception to honor a loved one that served in the Armed Forces, and has passed on.

With the city taking care of the rent, VHV doesn't have to worry about overhead and can focus on what the group does best – taking on veterans causes such as raising funds for a mammoth size flagpole, and equally stated flag at the location of the future veterans cemetery. The main entrance will be off Hassler Valley Road, near the Community Pantry.

Cuellar said the smoke and alcohol free veterans center has its doors opens on most days, and attracts some interesting characters and strikes up fond memories.

“We have had some good conversations in there,” he said. “You never know whose going to show up.”

THE AGREEMENT STATES, AMONG OTHER THINGS:

- The city pays the veterans center manager \$500 per month (Joe Zecca).
- The city is responsible for the electricity, water, sewer and solid waste charges and center management is responsible for natural gas charges.

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- The (minor) repairs to doors, windows, trim, drains and pipes are the responsibility of building management. (Minor repairs are those under \$200 per month, the agreement states).

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