

Thoreau Community Center lease renewed

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 12 May 2017 02:24



McKinley County to steadily monitor TCC

The McKinley County Board of Commissioners voted 3-0 May 9 to renew the lease of the Thoreau Community Center. The Community Center, whose executive director is Priscilla Manuelito, appeared before the panel last month in a last-ditch effort to get funds and argue for keeping the rental agreement in place.

The current agreement was put into place four years ago and expired in 2015. Manuelito told commissioners at an April 25 county meeting that the expiration matter just slipped everybody's mind.

"This is a very good sign," Manuelito said after the meeting. "Obviously, the Community Center is something that is very much needed in Thoreau and the surrounding communities. I think they know that and that's why they voted the way they did."

Thoreau has gone through a string of suicides over the years, hence the opening of the community center. The center's original director, Juliana Ko, taught at Thoreau High School and

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left for other opportunities about three years ago.

The community center was operating on an expired lease, yet has three full-time employees. The rent for the building, which the county owns, is \$1 per year.

McKinley County Manager Anthony Dimas and McKinley County Attorney Doug Decker reminded commissioners that the state Board of Finance is involved in the lease matter. In such a scenario, the state must have proof that there is a symbiotic relation between the community and the center.

“The state must have information and data on usage numbers that pertain to the anti-donation clause,” Dimas said. “You don’t have the numbers to support the anti-donation clause,” Dimas said.

The vote – Commissioner Bill Lee appeared via telephone due to the fact that he was attending a tourism meeting out-of-state – was for a one year lease with Manuelito or for Program Specialist Jasmine Henio to come before the commission with budget updates and numerical data on how many people come through the center’s doors and for what purpose.

The center’s operating hours and attendance numbers were points of contention with Lee at the last meeting. Also, the commissioners asked Manuelito about sharing the location with the Navajo Nation Behavioral Health, which has already met with county officials several times on origination their own building lease.

“What are your operating or business hours,” Lee asked. Manuelito said the center operates from 9 am to 5 pm from Monday through Thursday. Lee even pressed Manuelito about square footage of the building and appraisal. The Thoreau Community Center is located at 19 Paradise Lane and in a former abandoned and broken down building.

McKinley County Facility Manager Darrell Jimson said the building’s square footage is about 2,400. Lee estimated the value of the building at \$228,000.

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“How many hours do you provide to the community?” Lee said. “Have you looked in to possibly sharing the building with Navajo Nation Behavioral Health?”

Commissioner Carol Bowman-Muskett motioned to reduce the lease agreement to one-year, “so we (commissioners) can evaluate your group,” Bowman-Muskett said.

Manuelito has said that the center is good to go until 2021, which is when a current \$800,000 Substance Abuse Mental Health Service grant runs out. Along those lines, Manuelito said she is strictly a volunteer director so that operational cost doesn’t go up.

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