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Friday, 06 September 2019 06:53



With a traditional name

“It’s time for a new senior center, and Gallup needs one.”

Joe Gallegos, vice president of Huitt-Zolars, Inc., a design firm with a location in Albuquerque, opened his presentation to the Gallup City Council with that statement.

The presentation, given at the city council’s Aug. 27 regular meeting, was comprised of a programmatic feasibility study for two new buildings: a regional senior center and a regional recreational center.

These two buildings are being constructed in a similar area, between Wilson Avenue and Joseph Montoya Boulevard, next to the current Larry Brian Mitchell Recreational Center.

“There are good symbiotic relationships between the seniors and the multigenerational visitors at the recreational center,” Gallegos said, citing the reason for the buildings being close to one another.

Per the presentation, the City of Gallup commissioned the study for the new senior center because the existing Gallup Senior Center, 607 N. Fourth St., is unable to adequately serve the expanding needs and growing population of Gallup seniors.

Some of the focus areas included in the layout presented by Gallegos, include an expanded kitchen area to assist in reducing the current four shifts of meals now being served; the adjacent site which is currently inadequate for loading, unloading, and parking; and the fleet vehicles which are exposed to the public and sometimes vandalized.

The presentation stated the new regional senior center would measure under 27,000 square feet. Gallegos said the cost is slated to be $305 per square foot and include a commercial kitchen, athletic flooring, design with safety emphasis, acoustical treatment, and glare control.

The total estimated cost of the project is just over $11.3 million.

Dist. 4 Councilor Fran Palochak asked if it would be cost-efficient to implement the existing gym space into the proposed design.

Gallegos said that suggestion is in the planning document, and the conversations around the existing recreational center space could continue.

“There is a very strong argument for the basketball courts because of the senior olympic team,” Gallegos said. “They do drills there.”

Palochak also asked about the parking spaces that would be built for the new buildings, adding there has to be an adequate number of handicap spots.

Mayor Jackie McKinney said the parking lot factors will depend on the buildings’ capacity, which could change over time.

“The capacity would dictate the size of the parking lots and what spaces are needed,” he said.

During the presentation for the new recreational center design, Jose Zelaya, senior architect for Huitt-Zolars, Inc., said the designs were made based on the idea that visitors expect different things from a rec center than they did a decade ago.

“The models in cities like Albuquerque are what people expect,” Zelaya said. “People expect common spaces or rooms, and a lot of space for activity rooms.”

The design presented by Zelaya shows the new recreational center being partially two stories tall, with the first floor being used for a large gymnasium and various workout rooms, and designated areas where children can have their own activities.

The second story of the design will allow for quieter activities to be held. Zelaya said the design of the building would make visitors feel more engaged with the activities they participate in.

The projected size of the new recreational center is just over 54,000 square feet. The cost per square foot is $300, resulting in a total final project cost of over $24 million with equipment and other services.

After the presentation concluded, Palochak said the new building designs were beautiful, but she had a pressing concern.

“We would be knocking down the Larry Brian Mitchell Recreational Center for these buildings,” she said. “We should continue with his name. We can’t forget he brought his life into our town.”

Dist. 1 Councilor Linda Garcia echoed the comments of retaining Larry Brian Mitchell’s name for the new center, as well.

The two studies were approved with a 5-0-0 vote.

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