

City, county identify goals for upcoming legislative session

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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The second session of the 54th New Mexico Legislature is right around the corner, and the City of Gallup and McKinley County are making sure they each have their legislative priorities identified and ready to go.

The Gallup City Council and McKinley County Board of Commissioners held a joint work session at the El Morro Events Center, 210 S. Second St., Dec. 6 to discuss the items of importance to them.

The City of Gallup identified two issues of importance for budget and funding issues, and 10 more for capital outlay projects.

The city wants to target issues with reductions to Hold Harmless, a legal agreement that states that one party will not hold another party liable for risk, whether it is to a person or property. The city has lost about \$1.2 million in Hold Harmless funds in the past six years, and further reductions would result in having fewer employees and services, along with having to implement higher fees for those services.

The other issue is funding for the Behavioral Health Investment Zone, specifically the renewal of the BHIZ Grant Program, which provides \$500,000 annually.

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“We have not brought it up in the last few years because we’ve been very fortunate to receive funding in the past [for BHIZ],” City Manager Maryann Ustick said.

As for capital outlay issues, the city is seeking funding for construction of multiple buildings, including a new public safety building for the police department and Municipal Court, along with a regional library, senior citizens center, and animal shelter.

Ustick added the new public safety building project is the city’s most important planned project. Designs are already underway and the project should be shovel-ready in the next several months.

The construction of a new animal shelter was also highlighted by Ustick.

“[The current shelter] is overcrowded, and we turn away animals often. We just run out of space, and you know what happens to animals when we turn them away,” she said. “It’s a very important priority for us.”

Ustick said two potential sites for the new shelter have been identified: one in the place of the current shelter and one on Hassler Valley Road. Feasibility studies are still being done for both sites.

The city’s other priorities include the Coal Avenue Commons Construction Project; the East Nizhoni Boulevard Reconstruction Project; and renovations and improvements to the Red Rock Park performers’ quarters, the storm drainage system on West Aztec Avenue, and the Washington Park football field track.

In all, the projected funding costs for the 10 capital outlay projects comes to about \$21 million.

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Next, McKinley County Manager Anthony Dimas Jr. identified the issues the county is focused on for the upcoming session.

The highest budget priority for the county is funding for remodels for the McKinley County Adult Detention Center. Warden Tony Boyd was present at the meeting and said the jail can currently only house a little over 220 inmates, instead of over 320, when all the facilities are available and usable.

“We’re in a position now that we have to do something for existing buildings that have a lot of structural problems, and to try, and to remodel existing buildings,” Commissioner Billy Moore said.

Other budget projects include funding for economic development, county bridges, public safety vehicles for the McKinley County Sheriff’s Office, and a planned events center.

As for significant capital outlay concerns, Dimas identified obtaining funding for security resources at Courthouse Square, prisoner transport vehicles, and remodels for the Thoreau fire department.

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