Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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In June, the Gallup City Council approved the FY21 city budget, which included numerous reductions in services on city revenues and the governor's public health orders restricting in-person gatherings due to the impact of the COVID pandemic.

As a result, the budget called for the closure of city recreation centers, including Larry Brian Mitchell, Harold Runnels, the Aquatic Center, El Morro Theatre and Events Center, Cecil Garcia Fitness Center and Red Rock Park Convention Center and Arena through Sept. 30.

Memberships for the Aquatic Center and Cecil Garcia Fitness Center were suspended as well.

Fifty-four full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees were also furloughed through Sept. 30. About half of the positions were seasonal, and some furloughed employees were hired for other positions within the city.

During the city council's Sept. 22 meeting, City Manager Maryann Ustick said since they have not received word when public centers will be able to open under the public health orders, the city recommended they extend the closures and furloughs through Oct. 31.

"No one can predict the course of this pandemic, but the best guidance I got from the Governor's Office is there won't be any changes in the restrictions in the next 30 days," Ustick said.

Dist. 4 Councilor Fran Palochak asked how quickly the city could bring furloughed employees back into work if the governor's orders were to change. Ustick said the city would not be able to instantly reopen facilities or bring employees back in and train them in proper procedures.

"In the meantime, facility staff are ordering cleaning supplies and PPE. We would probably need about a week to get that done. If we do get advance notice and I have asked for it, that will help us a bit," Ustick said.

Dist. 2 Councilor Michael Schaaf wanted to note it is difficult for the employees to continue to be furloughed. Ustick said the federal aid of $300-600 a week has helped those employees, along with continued health insurance payments from the city.

The city moved to extend the closures and furloughs until Oct. 31 by a 5-0 vote.

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