

SADDLE UP

Written by By Kevin Opsahl Sun Correspondent
Friday, 02 April 2021 06:57



Gallup rides into a post-COVID sunrise

The coronavirus pandemic is not standing in the way of planning for numerous downtown projects and events celebrating the Gallup region's heritage.

Projects that had been slowed or even postponed because of the pandemic were on the minds of members of the Business Improvement District's board of directors, who were eager to hear about the Old Route 66 celebration, the Alley Project and Coal Avenue Commons.

ROUTE 66 CELEBRATION

Part of the former Route 66 runs through Gallup. It is a more than 2,000-mile stretch of road that was part of America's original highway system.

Gallup's tourism and marketing manager Jennifer Lazarz presented plans for the Route 66

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Celebration to the BID March 18. She explained that the roadway was decommissioned in 1985, but that some municipalities still keep the historic designation.

Gallupians call it “Highway 66,” while the state calls it “New Mexico Highway 118.”

Lazarz talked about a five-year “Route 66 Celebration” plan, made possible by the Federal Senate Act S1014 (Route 66 Centennial Act), signed in December by former President Donald Trump.

According to material she provided to the board, the “celebration” will include signage, marketing, and soliciting outreach from businesses and various organizations.

“Route 66 touches our whole community, so we need as (sic) many organizations on board and working together to support its development,” Lazarz wrote.

“There will be no one single celebration, but rather a collective effort across multiple organizations to develop us as a Route 66 destination,” she said.

Lazarz told BID she would go before the city council to ask for support. For now, she asked the BID board to come up with ideas to support the initiative by December and also inquired if Gallup’s portion of Highway 66 could get a new sign by utilizing a BID program.

Lazarz said she wants to find an engineer who can tell her if a fence along the highway would be able to structurally support an artistic display.

“If that clearance happens, then over the next year we’ll be installing art on the fence along Route 66 next to the Skate Park,” Lazarz wrote in an email to the *Sun*.

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She said the idea is tentative, pending approval from the Northern Santa Fe Railway Company.

COAL AVENUE COMMONS PROJECT

This project is meant to revitalize two blocks of Coal Avenue, running from First to Third streets.

"I've seen this in other communities, when projects like this are completed, people want to come down and experience them," the associate director of Gallup MainStreet Arts and Cultural District Michael Bulloch said. "I think Gallup looked at this and said, 'Okay, we've got to tear up this street and do this infrastructure, but ... do we want to put something better back?'"

The road is narrow, and so are its sidewalks. The project seeks to open up the sidewalks, but also turn Coal Avenue into a "festival street," Bulloch said.

"It gives room for stores to do things like sidewalk sales," Bulloch said. "That then becomes what we term 'street theater.' More people are drawn to that place ... It's kind of a nice snowball effect. That's really the kind of project this is."

Coal Avenue Commons will have other features, including: posts to distinguish the transition from pedestrian sidewalks and vehicular streets; new lighting; a street with bricks, as opposed to asphalt.

"They are having custom bricks made that harken back to the days when Gallup was a major supplier of bricks to the region. Each brick is stamped with the name GALLUP," Bulloch wrote in an email.

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Gallup-based Murphy Builders halted work on Phase One of Coal Avenue Commons due to the winter weather, but work has since resumed.

“They’re fairly confident that they’re still on track for the mid-to-late-May finish,” Bulloch said. “I’ve been down here all week [from Farmington] and they’ve been working on stuff everyday. They’re making good progress.”

While Lazarz waits for clearance to post more permanent displays, artists are installing temporary works on the fencing during the renovation. Gallup MainStreet Arts and Cultural District called on artists to post work with themes of “resilience, revitalization, and community.”

ALLEY PROJECT

The “Alley Project,” as it is called, is a multi-phase effort by the city to beautify existing alleyways that are in disrepair, but provide access to businesses. Those alleyways are located at First and Second streets (Phase One), and Second and Third streets (Phase Two).

The project has been years in the making, City Manager Maryann Ustick said. And unlike Coal Avenue Commons, the Alley Project did not halt construction during winter.

Various types of infrastructure, including water, sewer, gas electric and fiber-optic cable, had to be installed before the project could become a reality, she said. While some of those elements have been completed, Ustick said a “major project” to install drainage and pavers and underground trash containers is still ahead.

The Alleyway Project’s Phase Two, which includes the same needs as Phase One, could be completed after summer 2022, Ustick said.

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The board did not take action on any of the agenda items at the meeting, as they were billed as points for discussion.

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