

## Horses, bulls, stray cats on council agenda

Written by By Kevin Opsahl Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 23 April 2021 04:48

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The Gallup City Council dealt with a host of issues April 13, from annual summer events to stray cats — all of which have been impacted in one way or another by the coronavirus pandemic.

Following up on their earlier promise to act, council members decided the Best of the Best Rodeo could go forward, but only at a later date than in the past. They also approved a

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promoter's contract and budget for the event.

WildThing Championship Bullriding was discussed by the event's coordinator, council, city manager and top tourism official. The council will table a decision on holding it until the next meeting, while the city inquires about event logistics.

Another issue taken up by the council was a reported increase in the number of feral cats around the city.

## ***RODEO***

Best of the Best Rodeo promoter Walt Eddy previously told the council he hoped they would not cancel the 2021 rodeo outright without giving him and others more time to plan for the event.

Those plans were unveiled on April 13. According to the rodeo's budget provided on the city's website, the event would cost \$320,100 to put on. But officials say it will bring in \$357,250 in revenue.

"Walt is teaching me rodeo terms. We're hoping for a push on this and [to] be in the black, where revenues exceed expenditures," Assistant City Manager J.M. DeYoung told councilors.

Eddy himself acknowledged this budget is "quite a bit less" than the budgets from previous years. DeYoung said Eddy has been accommodating when it comes to making changes to this year's rodeo, including not giving out prizes.

Dist. 4 Councilwoman Fran Palochak wanted to know if Eddy would be paid if the event did not go on, as planned. DeYoung said Eddy would not, but added that if the rodeo took place, Eddy would be compensated.

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Eddy predicted 350 people could attend the rodeo, assuming the current event restrictions hold. While June is an “optimal” time to hold the rodeo, “I think we’re going to be fine” in August, he said.

Dist. 2 Councilman Michael Schaaf commented that the rodeo is a good event to have and “I think Gallup needs it.” At the meeting’s conclusion, he asked everyone to get vaccinated, continue to socially distance, and wear masks.

### ***BULL RIDING***

WildThing advertises itself on Facebook as the “No. 1 open bullriding [event] in the Southwest,” though organizer Larry Peterson made clear to councilors it is “not a cousin” to the Best of the Best Rodeo, as his event only focuses on one activity.

Peterson asked councilors to approve the event at Red Rock Park on July 9 and 10 — the same timeframe for the whole championship’s history.

Palochak noted that the bull riding competition typically attracts plenty of people and asked Peterson how he would maintain social distancing during an event like that. Peterson responded that the ticket outlets would only sell the number allowed for the event.

City Manager Maryann Ustick said she would work with the fire marshall to come up with a plan for the event and the council could table the decision until the next meeting.

Peterson was grateful.

“If we don’t get to have it this time, that’s a three-year gap, so I just appreciate everyone looking at it, talking about it and trying to help us make it happen,” he said.

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Jennifer Lazarz, tourism and marketing manager for Gallup, told counselors there is a grant program being made available by the state to help cities market events, even while they are having trouble holding them during the pandemic.

### ***FERAL CATS***

Cosy Balok, animal protection supervisor at Gallup Animal Control, said over the last year, residents have complained about stray cats in their neighborhoods — and the number of calls from upset residents is growing.

“As you know, we cover both city and county, so this problem is in neighborhoods [all over],” she said. “Residents don’t understand the predicament that we’re in with this amount of animals.”

Balok outlined the factors that contribute to the feral cat problem.

The city’s shelter was closed for three months in 2020 due to coronavirus, putting a halt to trappings, and spaying and neutering.

The city only has 16 cages to house cats, leaving the Humane Society with the cost of sheltering, and spaying or neutering the animals until they’re released. Balok predicts it’s an unsustainable model for the organization.

Two veterinarians come in to spay/neuter three times a week, “which is not enough” to keep up with the number of cats, Balok wrote in a memo to councilors.

Cats are not euthanized unless they attack animal control personnel, Balok said. Otherwise, they are spayed or neutered and released as barn cats, or they are returned to their original neighborhoods.

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“Any time that any amount of animals are spayed and neutered, it helps the entire community,” Balok said.

Balok provided councilors a letter from Gallup resident Charles Vargas, an instructor with Dylan Vargas Mixed Martial Arts. He said he caught at least 10 cats in the last few months.

“I could catch cats everyday, but due to the high amount of cats being turned in to the Humane Society, I have to call to make sure they have room for more,” Vargas wrote.

“We’re doing all we can physically handle,” Balok said. “I think it’s an awareness that we all need to come together — city, county residents — in solving this problem.”

Mayor Louie Bonaguidi expressed appreciation for Balok bringing the issue to everyone’s attention. He has seen cats running around the city, but never thought it was a big issue.

“I think the community should be aware of the situation and this is probably the best way to do it,” Bonaguidi said.

Dist. 3 Councilman Yogash Kumar was one of several council members who addressed the feral cat issue, saying, “It’s been difficult for everybody” and the issue is vast, spanning Gallup and the entire county. He cited the animal shelter as at least one way to address the problem.

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