

Domestic violence shelter to get a new building

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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MOLD, ROOF ISSUES PLAGUE CURRENT LOCATION

McKinley County commissioners voted to approve over \$1.5 million for a new shelter for battered families at their Jan. 11 meeting. The McKinley County Domestic Violence Shelter for Battered Families has been serving county residents for 43 years.

“The \$1.5 million is for the design of a new emergency shelter to meet all of our community needs,” the non-profit organization’s executive director Emily Ellison explained. “We used our data and made a list of on average how many people need shelter at a given point [and] that showed that we needed to expand our emergency shelter building.”

Ellison said that ideally, each shelter should be able to house about 24 to 28 people and that there should be room for expansion for up to 34.

The Western New Mexico University Foundation donated six acres of land to the organization for its new building. Ellison said they chose an architecture firm based out of Boston to help with the design.

MASS Design Group was Ellison’s choice. She said it has a background in trauma-informed design.

Trauma-informed care is described by the University of Buffalo’s Center for Social Research as care that promotes environments of healing and recovery. It is practiced when caretakers

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understand and consider the pervasive nature of trauma and take special measures to avoid activities and services that may inadvertently serve to re-traumatize clients.

Architects and interior designers use trauma-informed design to support the people who have experienced trauma and are receiving specialized care. This can include supporting self-reliance and removing and reducing any known stimuli and environmental stresses that may adversely affect those receiving help.

Ellison also noted that the organization's clients and staff had input into the design.

"... [We] collected data and got feedback from not only the staff, but the clients [as well] in designing this concept, and I think it's good that the primary users and the stakeholders were providing feedback," she said.

The groundbreaking for the project should begin by the late spring, and the building should be complete by late summer or early fall 2023.

Ellison said the new shelter is expected to cost \$19 million. Battered Families recently applied for a capital outlay grant to cover that amount, along with the \$1.5 million that was approved during the commissioners meeting.

Since Battered Families is a non-profit organization, it will not be able to receive whatever amount it does receive in capital outlay directly. The money has to go through a governmental entity. During the Feb.1 commissioners meeting, the commissioners unanimously agreed to write a letter of support for the organization to act as its fiscal agent.

Ellison was unable to disclose the location of the new shelter, but she said it was near "a good school" and close to shopping areas, hospitals, and the police department.

While the new shelter may promise a brighter future, the organization is still dealing with some

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issues they've been facing for a while now. In Dec. 2020, the *Sun* published an article [Vol. 6 Issue 298, Dec. 11, 2020] with the headline "Domestic violence shelter on track to make facility improvements."

That article stated that \$90,000 would be spent on mold removal and a new roof for the organization's administrative building. That is still in the works.

Ellison said that the county had sent out two companies to look at the facility, and they've already had several companies give them quotes and review the building.

"We're making do with what we can, the space that we work out of is pretty limited, and it'd be good to give the staff a good working space," Ellison said.

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