Money pit or diamond in the rough?

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Golf course PROJECT PROPOSES TO remedy ongoing problems

The Fox Run Golf Course is undergoing major renovations to replace the irrigation system and reconfigure the landscape drainage system. Mid-America Golf and Landscape won the bid for the project at a little under $3 million and began work on Feb. 17.

As for the completion date, “Our contract says July 9th, so we’ll be done by then,” said Joe Salvatore, the project superintendent.

Salvatore mentioned that the course had a lot of unhealthy grass and serious erosion problems when he arrived. The new irrigation system “will certainly be more efficient,” Salvatore added.

The majority of the irrigation water comes from the water treatment plant on the west side of town, though a small proportion of fresh water is mixed in to achieve proper pH levels. The water will now be controlled by a computerized irrigation system that allows for precise and immediate adjustments. Gone are the days of manually turning valves out on the course to regulate irrigation flow.

The new drainage system will allow water to collect and soak into the ground in certain areas, slowing it down and preventing erosion from rain and snow melt.

The course opened in 1965, and its old infrastructure has been requiring constant repair. Mayor Jackie McKinney said the budget for the course is about $800,000 a year and “much of that expense was maintenance and replacing broken water lines.”

The upkeep became a constant burden for the city.

“It was either do it right, fix the golf course, or just close it,” McKinney said.

Though citizens gave input both for and against the golf course renovations at City Council meetings, the final vote was unanimous, 5-0 in favor of the project.

McKinney hopes the improvements will cut yearly maintenance costs in half while boosting revenue. This would save the city money in the long run while providing a top-notch golf course for residents and visitors. He estimates that a full return on investment will take six to seven years.

On Feb. 1, the city hired a new manager for Fox Run Golf Course, Max Johnson, a graduate of New Mexico State University's turf management program. After the construction is complete, it will be up to Johnson to maintain the course and the city's investment. With the new water systems in place, money can be spent on keeping the course in prime condition rather than patching up dilapidated greens.

The city has a consulting contract with NMSU, so experts can be called upon for help when needed, but the golf course still remains under Gallup's control. Max Johnson is now a full-time city employee. McKinney felt that hiring a qualified golf course manger was critical for the future of Fox Run.

The $3 million for the renovations came from the environmental surcharge fund, which is taxpayer money. The fund accumulates roughly $1 million per year and had a balance of about $13 million when the golf course overhaul was approved, according to McKinney.

While some question the value of a golf course in Gallup, McKinney said, "there's at least 500 people that play golf in this area."

He thinks a group that large deserves an opportunity to recreate in Gallup. McKinney also hopes that having a great golf course will encourage new business and increase tourist dollars for Gallup in the future.

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