

Is Gallup Getting that bad?

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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The Gallup City Council approved a security measure Nov. 9 related to the installation of metal detectors at the taxpayer-funded City Hall. The measure isn't designed to make the two-story Aztec Avenue building a fortress, but to put into place a system to thwart potential danger.

Assistant City Manager John DeYoung introduced the matter to council members who must now wait on the return of more information. That should come by the end of the year, DeYoung said.

"We presented general information on metal detectors," he said "We will come back at a later council meeting and give additional information."

At a June city council meeting, the idea of a metal detector was initially brought up by City Councilor Allan Landavazo strictly for informational purposes.

City Manager Maryann Ustick brought some information back to council at a subsequent meeting. The idea now is to ascertain specific information on the cost of which kinds of metal detectors would best serve City Hall.

At Tuesday's meeting, the idea talked about was to place at least one detector at the front of the entrance to City Hall so that members of the public could be screened for potential weapons like guns, knives or "shanks."

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"This is to ensure the safety of the public and meeting participants at city council meetings," DeYoung said. "That's what this is essentially."

Landavazo asked what type of things will a detector monitor, and DeYoung replied that metal objects and keys would be surveilled. City Councilor Fran Palochak cautioned against slowing the whole entry process to City Hall.

"How much would that detain people?" Palochak asked. "I'm concerned that things would get backed up," a reference to airport-like lines which people wait to go through.

Preliminarily, DeYoung said city staffers obtained price ranges on metal detectors certified by the Transportation Security Administration and similar to the devices used at airports around the United States. He said the metals detectors researched are battery-operated and portable.

DeYoung said the cost for the detector is \$4,427 plus an additional \$14.20 per hour for the added security guard during city council meetings. The price quote came from Protective Technologies International of Lehi, Utah.

The metal detectors didn't have many council detractors, but Gallup Police Chief Phillip Hart advised that more information definitely should be gathered. Hart said there are things to consider like timeliness, human surgical matters, machine malfunctions and assuring that employees thoroughly understand the technology.

"There are a lot of policies and procedures associated with this," Hart said. "I think we have to know what the policies are and how far will they go?"

Mayor Jackie McKinney echoed the comments by Hart.

"There are probably quite a few policies that have to be looked at," he said.

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DeYoung explained that search wands will be used by a posted security officer once a metal detector is set off.

“Staff conferred with the city’s current security provider as to the operation of this enhanced security system for city council meetings,” he said.

The city’s security services, Blackstone Security, provides unarmed guards.

“However, at some of their contract locations around the state they do provide metal detection services,” he said. “Blackstone ... would be willing to staff the metal detector for city council meetings at no increased cost to the current services provided.”

DeYoung said he’ll be calling various municipalities around New Mexico to see how they handle security at city council meetings.

While there have been no real gun or knife dangers at City Hall recently, there have been public domestic disputes and an instance where someone defecated inside the building. There have also been instances where some members of the general public have barged uninvited into the mayor’s and city manager’s offices.

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