

New senior center has a price tag of \$7 million

Written by By Molly Adamson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 18 June 2021 01:46



As Gallup's population continues to age, city administrators have begun looking at building a bigger senior citizen center, and Mayor Louis Bonaguidi said it could be ready as soon as 2023, or 2024 at the latest.

The city used to have two senior citizen centers, one on the north side of the city; Neighborhood Senior Center at 607 N. Fourth St. - and the other on the south side, Ford Canyon Senior Center at 908 E Buena Vista Ave. Both of the centers had been running for about 30 years, according to Bonaguidi, before the Ford Canyon Senior Center was shut down about four years ago.

Neighborhood's senior program director Kimberly Ross-Toledo explained that the south side center was closed because there weren't enough seniors to justify staffing two centers and paying two sets of overhead costs. State funding was also an issue. In an interview with the *Sun*, Bonaguidi said the state told the previous administration that it would no longer support two centers.

"It was more economic[al] and feasible to have one center," Ross-Toledo stated.

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“We were splitting activities between the two centers as well, and we didn’t have enough volunteers,” she said. “A lot of the activities were being canceled because we didn’t have enough volunteers who wanted to host those activities.”

“[Every time] we tried to put them together there was an uproar,” Bonaguidi said. “Then the state came in and said, ‘Look, we’re not supporting two senior citizen centers. So if you guys don’t comply and move it into one, we’ll just cut the funding.’”

Bonaguidi explained that a lot of people in the community used to be against combining the two communities. But now that the south center is no longer there, things seem to be working out.

Ross-Toledo said the seniors originally felt territorial about the centers and didn’t want people from the south side coming to the north, but once they were told it would lead to more activity participation and social interaction, more people got on board with the idea.

“In the last couple years we have had a significant number of senior consumers who support the idea,” Ross-Toledo commented. “They really want to see some investment in seniors in the community and so they’re all on board with working towards a new center that will reach more consumers and [have] the flexibility of hosting and coordinating Senior Olympic and different statewide senior coalitions.”

“[Separating the centers] made no sense anyway, because on Fridays most of the south side [residents] would go to the north side because they had chili,” Bonaguidi commented.

Ross-Toledo said Neighborhood’s building is well-built, but it does have some significant issues, such as a leaky roof.

Bonaguidi appeared in front of the county’s Board of Commissioners during the May 4 meeting to request help in paying for the design of the new, bigger Regional Senior Center. He asked the board to match the funds the city is going to provide, and the board unanimously agreed.

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The new building's design will run \$650,000, with the bill totaling \$7 million. The county and the city will share the cost. Since the county is helping foot the bill, they requested the official name of the center be the Gallup-McKinley County Senior Center.

During the May 25 city council meeting Assistant City Manager Jon DeYoung, Bonaguidi, and Ross-Toledo asked the council for support with the Senior Capital Outlay Project application.

The funding would provide equipment and help the city build the senior center.

"One of the reasons that we went after it at this particular time is because it's a general obligation bond, which people vote on every two years," Bonaguidi said.

In an interview with the *Sun*, he explained that if the city gets this funding the center will be able to be completed in the next two to three years, instead of five.

Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, expressed her support for the senior center.

"This is a move in the right direction," she said.

She also liked the name suggestion. "I'm so thankful to the county for giving us money for the design simply because the center is used by many city and county residents.

"I think we need to let our egos go aside. We need to look at what's best for the people, our citizens who are seniors, and get the best possible senior center we can get," she said.

The council approved the city applying for the bond.

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