

Under new management

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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County to take over operations of Red Rock Park

The city and county have ambitious plans for Red Rock Park, and took a big step toward realizing them recently with an agreement for the county to manage the property that was agreed upon during the Aug. 9 city council meeting.

“This is really a big deal. [...] We’ve been in conversation about Red Rock State Park for over a year,” Mayor Louie Bonaguidi said, explaining the park was initially a partnership of the city, state and the Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial. “Around 1991 the state said they wanted no part of it and deeded it over to the city. All these years, all we’ve ever done with the park is Band-Aid the facility.”

Starting Oct. 1, the county will take over operating the park. The city will retain ownership and rights to use the facility, as well as control of the Native American museum. The contract runs until June 30, 2027, but has wiggle room to end the deal if either party is dissatisfied with the results.

“We are not giving up anything,” Bonaguidi said. “This is two groups coming together for the betterment of the facility. They will match everything we put into it. They will run it.”

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Benefits include working together to get grant funding to make improvements, something County Manager Anthony Dimas said is well under way, as the county commission approved it July 28.

“We are working on a \$7 million grant application,” Dimas said, adding that he and County Chairman Billy Moore met with Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham on Aug. 8. “It does look promising. We have another source the governor’s office told us to look at. [...] We are hoping to get \$7 million this year and another \$7 million next year.”

The county is also eyeing a second road into the property, Dimas said.

“The right of way is already there for the road from White Cliffs, under the park at the second entrance. Even if it is just for emergencies or to let people out after events, it’s going to come in handy,” Dimas said.

Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, had to be reassured it was a good move. She was concerned about existing events and employees remaining under the same terms.

All of the city’s agreements with event producers – Best of the Best, Wild Thing, the Ceremonial, the Lions Club rodeo and an annual employee appreciation dinner – will remain in effect.

“We’re going to honor all the events here,” Moore said. “It seems like there was some confusion that we are going to go in and make big changes. We’re looking to try to minimize any changes at all.”

The three city employees posted at Red Rock will be given the option to continue their jobs as county employees, or stay with the city in different jobs.

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“If they want to move over, we will take ‘em,” Dimas said. “We’re ready to expand to 10 staff out there.”

The deal also provides for retaining institutional knowledge, allowing for city employees to work on special events at the county’s expense.

The city will pay the county \$337,500 to run the park from October through June 30, and \$450,000 per year after that. If operating the park costs less than that, any overage will go toward park improvements. The city will continue providing utility service, for which the county will pay out of park operations fees.

“This gives us a chance to make that facility blossom,” Bonaguidi said. “To me it’s a crown jewel. There is no other community anywhere that has such a facility as we have.”

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