

Saving the Fox Run Golf Course

Written by By Melinda Russell Sun Correspondent
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Mayor Jackie McKinney and all four city councilors voted to fix Fox Run Golf Course during their regularly scheduled council meeting July 28. At a price tag of over \$3 million, the taxpayers of Gallup, over time, will foot the bill. It's a move the council hopes will garner the support of the community.

The city hired Wilson and Company Engineers and Architects out of Phoenix, Ariz. to complete a study of the course and make a recommendation that would be a longterm fix instead of a short-term Band-Aid. In essence, Wilson and Company draws the plans and they tell the city what needs to be fixed.

The key to longterm success, said Architectural Manager Howard Kaplan of Wilson and Company, is an effective irrigation system.

"You can't grow grass unless you have water and the water is in the right place," he said.

Kaplan said NMSU's Turf Grass Management Program has been somewhat successful in restoring the greens on the course, but they are not addressing the other issues that plague the golf course.

The engineering team from Wilson and Company along with employees of the golf course did a walk through of each of the 18-holes. They identified a long list of problems, including drainage paths and service roads that cross fairways, areas that need grading and re-seeding, overgrown bunkers, ponding issues that need to be resolved and safety near Miyamura High School.

At this juncture, there are probably more prairie dogs enjoying the course than there are golfers.

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It was the general consensus from community comment and council comment that Gallup needs to pay to fix the golf course or close it for good. The yearly golf course budget has been between \$700,000 and \$900,000, said McKinney, of which about half is spent on repeated repairs.

“It will never make money,” he said. “It is a quality of life issue.”

During public comment, most were in favor of the fix. Regional Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters, Sarah Piano, encouraged the council to put the money into a longterm plan that would fix the golf course. As an employee of a non-profit that hosts golf tournaments, she wants to be able to use the facilities.

She also said that statistics show that one in three men driving on the highway have golf clubs with them. If we had a golf course that was attractive to avid golfers, she explained, Gallup would benefit from them stopping to play.

John Lewis Taylor works with the Junior Golf Association. He said their program is working with an average of 80 golfers each summer. The program is supported by the Kiwanis Clubs and the Elks Lodge. Last summer, they hosted the Notah Begay Foundation for their participants. “Golf is a life-long sport,” he said. “You can play it from the time you’re four or six until you’re in your 90s.”

“Whether you are working with companies that are recruiting or building, a good golf course is a must for successful economic development,” said Patty Lundstrom, executive director of the Greater Gallup Economic Development Corporation. “I certainly support it.”

GGEDC Board Member and local contractor Rick Murphy said golf courses, hospitals and schools all tie in to successful economic development.

There was discussion about the cost of the project and whether other projects, such as roads,

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curbs and gutters, would be neglected. McKinney addressed those concerns saying the money has already been set aside for the golf course mitigation plan and that no other projects will be negatively affected by the allocation of these funds.

Councilor Allan Landavazo said the city will use funds from the environmental surcharge tax to fund the \$3 million project, which includes the planning and implementation of an irrigation and drainage system at the golf course.

The city has paid for 12 studies over the past 20 years, but none have ever been applied, McKinney said.

Wilson and Company has drafted a preliminary plan, and the next step is to go out for bid to find a contractor to complete the on sight work. Once the bid is awarded, the construction phase of the project will take about six months Kaplan said. The construction phase will include fixing the issues listed above as well as installing a new water system.

Kaplan said the key to the success of this project is a fertigation system. A fertigation system is an irrigation system that has fertilizer and fungicides added to the water. They are used in California, Arizona and El Paso, TX with great success, he said.