

City motions for intragovernmental agreement for wellness hotels

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 06 November 2020 07:03



County willing to fund the program

As a result of the COVID pandemic, congregate shelters around Gallup have had to operate in a reduced capacity or close entirely. The city is now in dire need of shelter for people who are at risk as the pandemic continues, even more so with the cold weather quickly approaching.

This situation was brought before the Gallup City Council during their Oct. 27 meeting by City Manager Maryann Ustick.

“The city is not doing this for the administrative funds. We’re doing it because it’s a need for our community and it needs to be met,” she said.

Ustick said the city received about \$900,000 in federal CARES Act funding from the state, which was not sufficient to fund the Wellness Hotel Program for which the city applied.

McKinley County received significantly more federal funding from the state, about \$16 million, and she said the county is willing to fund the Wellness Hotel Program provided the city administers the program.

Specifically, the county has agreed during their Oct. 27 meeting to fund the Wellness Hotel Program up to \$350,000 through Dec. 30, the current end date for CARES Act funding.

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If the ordinance for the agreement is adopted, the county would be responsible for administering contracts, troubleshooting, and reporting with community partners to make the program successful, Ustick added.

Deborah Martinez, of the city's Behavioral Health Investment Zone, gave more information about how the program would work.

She reiterated the shelter program will be for people who are homeless and at-risk of catching COVID.

"We usually see those people through the hospital or NCI, but we have provided an online form which [health care] providers can access and submit to us," Martinez said.

Potential patients have to be screened for medical conditions to reduce the liability, Martinez continued, which will determine if the patient is admitted. As a result, those patients will have to contact the program through their health care provider, like Na Nizhoozhi Center.

"We're going to make the program more accessible to people who need it and make the community and providers aware so they can access these services, because we want these people safe and in secure housing," Martinez said.

Dist. 4 City Councilor Fran Palochak voiced her appreciation for the agreement with the county.

"With all the COVID restrictions we have in place, there are limited places for homeless people to go, so this is most needed, and I really want to thank the county for doing this," she said.

The motion to pick up the intragovernmental agreement with McKinley County for the Wellness Hotel Program was approved with a 5-0 vote.

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