

The wrong side of the tracks?

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Disagreements continue over the new library's proposed location

The Gallup City Council approved the new regional library location a couple of months ago, but a few of the councilors are still unsure about the northern site.

During the Oct. 12 city council meeting, Brandon Howe, a planner with the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments, went over the Modified Downtown Redevelopment Plan. The

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NMCOG was put in charge of redeveloping the document, and Howe explained to the councilors that some of the projects in the plan would take one to three years, some would take four to six, and others would require seven to ten years to complete.

The new site for the regional library fell in the four-to-six-year time frame. While it was not something on the agenda specifically, some of the councilors took the opportunity to voice their concerns about the library's proposed location. The new location is just north of the railroad tracks and south of Maxwell, between Second and Third Streets.

Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, argued that putting the library on the north side of the railroad tracks would drive traffic away from the downtown area. She said that people would most likely drive to the library and then continue north, completely skipping the downtown area.

"So I do not see that as unifying the town and redeveloping the downtown area," Palochak said. "Rather, it's separating us by putting the library on the north side."

In an interview with the *Sun*, Councilor Yogash Kumar, Dist. 3, said his issue with the location has to do with the idea that the library wouldn't necessarily bring tourists to Gallup. He also noted that the library would close at a specific time, which would mean a part of downtown wouldn't be getting used at night.

Kumar favors putting an event center in the proposed location. He would also like to see store fronts that would get used more frequently at night.

Mayor Louis Bongauidi also had some doubts about the location.

"I have a feeling that the location of the library is probably going to change about three or four more times before the actual date [of construction]," Bongauidi commented.

Octavia Fellin Public Library's Executive Director Tammie Moe shared the councilors' and

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mayor's comments with the Library Advisory Board during their Oct. 21 meeting. She also said she disagreed with the councilors, specifically Palochak.

"I disagree with Councilor Palochak that if the library is on the north side nobody's going to come downtown," Moe said. "If the library is that crucial then there has to be a space for it; not squeezing it into whatever is left."

In an interview with the *Sun*, she shared her enthusiasm for the proposed location.

"I think the site is fantastic," Moe said. "That area of downtown has been neglected for years, primarily because it is on the wrong side of the tracks."

Moe explained to the advisory board that she envisions the area becoming a cultural district, with a Cultural Center that could include room for things like performance arts, exhibition spaces, and even a sculpture garden.

The subject of the train tracks in relation to the library was also discussed. While Palochak and Kumar see it as a problem, Moe and the advisory board do not.

"The concerns about the crossing of the track; it's almost as if we are saying that one side of the track is more important than the other side of the track, and surely that can't be something that we would adhere to," Moe said.

Lynn Isaacson, the advisory board's chairman, argued that putting a convention or event center there instead of a library would only cause problems, such as accidents involving drunk people.

"Believe me, you'd have a better chance of conventioners getting run over by a train than kids; especially if there's a liquor license there," Isaacson said.

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While the issue of where the library will end up may still be up in the air, Moe encouraged the board to continue with its plans for the new library.

She said she would send out invitations to a selection of people who may be on the Executive Planning Committee for the new library. There are 19 nominees, but the committee will only include 10 or 12 people. Moe asked the nominees to get back to her with their responses by Nov. 1.

The board will also need to find a facilitator to help the committee make decisions. She said they have budgeted \$1,500 for the facilitator.

Once the facilitator is named and the committee is formed, a community visionary process will be held to identify the needs and service responses for the new regional library using existing information and a community SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis.

Moe said she expects the committee will hold six bi-weekly meetings. Those meetings could start as soon as November.

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