

Next for Cody events center may be site analysis

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CODY - A detailed evaluation of at least three potential sites may be the next step in deciding whether to build an event center here, with the purpose of the proposed facility likely to play a large role in determining its location.

The event center committee is scheduled to meet at 11 a.m. Wednesday at City Hall to hear public input and discuss the need for a formal site evaluation.

The funding and methodology of such a study, if it is commissioned, would be decided by the Cody City Council. Estimates put its cost at about \$6,000.

The Cody Country Chamber of Commerce is calling for a detailed public survey that would use a point-based evaluation system to examine logistical feasibility and voter support for three possible sites.

"Park County voters are best served with an analysis that is complete, fair and equitable if they are to make an educated decision on funding," said Executive Director Kim Jones in a written statement detailing a unanimous vote by the group's board of directors backing the study.

"We strongly feel the analysis should include three locations: the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, the Cody Auditorium and the land adjacent to the Stampede Park," the statement said.

"We need to slow down the pace," Jones said by telephone, adding that it will be at least two years before Park County voters would consider a ballot measure to fund an event center using an optional 1-cent sales tax.

"This is something we've waited a long time for and worked on, so we need to take the time to make sure it's done right or not at all," she said.

Jones said she has heard from chamber members backing each of the three proposed sites, and that while "many people talk about where they 'feel' an event center should go," a detailed survey would "take the guesswork out of the process."

"The only site we know anything about is the auditorium site," said Andy Whiteman, city administrator.

A 2002 study provided detailed information on that location, but specifics ranging from soil analysis to utility availability for other sites are unknown, he said.

Determining which site is best includes deciding what kind of facility should be built, said mortgage broker Deb Simpson, a member of local and regional horse clubs.

"I feel like there's not enough information at this time to make a determination," Simpson said.

She said a recently completed study by consultant Rod Markin did not fully examine the demand for a multipurpose arena that could be used for equestrian meets, sporting events and other large indoor happenings.

Whiteman said Markin would provide additional information later this month detailing how he concluded there is insufficient demand for an equestrian center.

Such an arena would not fit at the auditorium or museum sites, Simpson said.

"Some people say that it has to be one facility, and I'm not sure it can't be two facilities," she said, adding that for any proposal to be approved, it must appeal to a broad cross section of voters.

Whiteman said an equestrian center would require dozens of horse stalls, and could be built on available land near the rodeo grounds.

Another option is to locate it at the Park County Fairgrounds in Powell, where there are already many stalls and other supporting infrastructure, he said.

Simpson said Park County could operate the facility, and the proposal might appeal to Powell voters.

"That's fine with me, and I would love to see a facility built," she said. "But as a Cody resident, I hate to see us lose out on that."

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