



Weed Community Center

SUMMARY

Early in July, the Grand Jury received an inquiry regarding the history, use and status of the Weed Community Center. Inasmuch as the Boles Fire had destroyed the former building, which had been designated as the community center, the Grand Jury wanted to update Siskiyou County residents regarding the status of the Weed Community Center.

The first facility was built on the site of the former Weed High School gymnasium; it housed the Adult Day Health Care program. In 2013, it became the Weed Community Center. The Boles Fire subsequently destroyed it. While the destruction of the former community center was a loss for the citizens of Weed, it provided an opportunity for the community to build a substantially improved facility, which will better serve a broader segment of citizens of Weed.

METHODOLOGY

Records, documents and correspondence not destroyed in the Boles Fire were reviewed as far back as 1991. Interviews were conducted with current Weed Recreation and Parks District (WRPD) staff and board members, as well as current and past city council members.

BACKGROUND

In 1991, the Great Northern Corporation (GNC), a nonprofit corporation, purchased a piece of property from the City of Weed for the sum of \$10,000. This property was later divided into two parcels, one of which contained the old Weed High School gymnasium. In 2004, prior to a grant application submitted by the City of Weed, with the Great Northern Corporation's assistance, the old gym was condemned and demolished. A grant application in the amount of \$1,000,000 was approved in May 2005 to build a new "Community Facilities Building".

The new building was to house the following: the Adult Day Health Care Program, a pool, the Food Commodities Program, Low Income Heat and Energy Assistance Program, Weatherization Program and a Wellness Center.

Due to a number of factors such as lower utilization, changing community needs and the changing objectives of Great Northern Corporation (the prior owner of the building), the facility was placed on the market.

WRPD stepped in and purchased the Community Facilities Building in 2013 made possible by an \$800,000 grant from The Ford Family Foundation. Additionally, funds in the amount of \$400,000 were applied for and received from the McConnell Foundation for outfitting the remodeled building and constructing a fully functional commercial kitchen. The original purpose of the redesigned building was changed to allow more members of the community greater access to, and use of, the facility. The new kitchen made a variety of new functions possible. The center was completed and opened for use in April 2014.

After the transition to WRPD management, the renovation and use of the Community Center building had been moving along smoothly until September 14, 2014, when the Boles Fire destroyed the entire structure and all contents.

From 1991 until the Boles Fire, the citizens of Weed and the surrounding communities had seen the transition of a condemned gymnasium into a senior services facility, and later into a fully functioning community center without ever having to spend any city funds. The acquisition, building and transitions had all been accomplished through grants administered by others.

The grants obtained in 2013 allowed WRPD, a fully independent special district, to gain complete local control and management of the facility. Further, as a result of having had the foresight to fully insure the building and its contents, the WRPD is currently in control of \$2.2 million in insurance proceeds. Two other portions of insurance proceeds for \$305,000 and \$57,000 have also been received. Insurers upon approval of plans for the proposed new facility will release an additional balance of \$233,000. This additional \$600,000 will be included in the rebuilding and refurbishing of the proposed community center. The Weed Recreation and Parks District still has \$200,000 remaining from the McConnell Foundation grant of 2013, which are also earmarked for the rebuilding effort.

DISCUSSION

WRPD has plans to break ground for the proposed state-of-the-art community center in June 2017. The Grand Jury learned that WRPD had already purchased 18 acres of land in Angel Valley. This property is located near East Lincoln Avenue and Oak Street in Weed, and is comprised of three six-acre parcels. A 14,000 square foot building will be constructed on five of these acres. The former Weed Community Center building was only 11,000 square feet with limited parking, while the new location will accommodate at least 150 parking spaces.

In addition, the increased building space will allow opportunities for the creation of new sources of revenue by leasing, renting or subleasing space to those wishing to provide additional services to the community.

Discussions have also taken place regarding the possible return of a senior lunch program. As of the date of this report, a senior lunch program has not been fully designed, and may involve other local agencies.

Plans for the proposed community center include a wellness center, which will house a therapeutic pool and exercise facility for use by seniors and others. Fitness and training will be available, and a dance studio is in the planning stages. Additional discussions about future senior programming are ongoing.

A commercial kitchen will be available for use by individuals, groups and small businesses. A spacious event room is being designed to accommodate larger community events. A conferencing center will have meeting rooms, office space and storage capabilities. Plans include a computer network with at least six workstations for public use. The building will also be Wi-Fi capable. Other amenities such as restrooms, showers and locker rooms are planned.

Due to the increased area available on the sizable new property, there will be other opportunities considered for additional use in the future, as new phases of development occur. Ideas being considered include an RV park, a dog park and an outdoor sports complex, which could include soccer, baseball, softball fields and tennis and basketball courts.

WRPD and Great Northern Corporation have formed a partnership to assist in the development of future plans, which opens the door to new financial and planning opportunities. A key consideration for this facility will be the opportunity for potential income generation so that the center becomes, and remains, economically sustainable and independent.

FINDINGS

- F1. Due to the efforts of Weed Recreation and Parks Department, the citizens of Weed and the surrounding communities are in the process of building a fully functional community center that will provide many needed services to a much broader segment of the public.

DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.
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