

THE DAILY SENTINEL

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Council pursues feasibility grant for a rec center

100 supporters applaud decision to fund study with \$25,000 grant

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The Grand Junction City Council wanted to see support for a community recreation center. They got it Monday night.

With about 100 backers ranging from young people to retirees packing council chambers and \$25,000 in contingent grant funding, city councilors got what they were seeking.

And members of a grassroots organization also got their wish: The go-ahead from the council for the city to apply for a matching \$25,000 Department of Local Affairs grant for a study to examine the feasibility of building a recreation center in town.

The approval came about a year after the council directed members of PLACE, People for Local and Community Enrichment, to come back with a measure of support and a plan for their recreation center proposal.

After a roughly hourlong presentation and discussion Monday, councilors gave the group the nod, a first milestone that was followed by rousing applause.

"... You know what challenge you have ahead of you," Councilor Phyllis Norris said, referring to work done by a partner committee that attempted to pass a tax measure for an event center in last November's election.

The measure failed by a 3-1 margin.

"We all thank you for your work," Norris said, calling it "commendable."

"We need more citizens like you."



PHYLIS NORRIS

"You know what challenge you have ahead of you."



BARBARA TRAYLOR SMITH

"(These studies) sit on the shelf if there's no funding for them."

PLACE members secured \$5,000 from the Rocky Mountain Health Foundation and \$20,000 from the Colorado Health Foundation, contingent upon obtaining the DOLA grant.

Support for a center is evident by the 800 people who approve of the idea in a survey, 2,000 signatures secured at various public events and about 1,000 people who follow the GJ Community Center Facebook page, PLACE organizer Andrey Krievs told councilors.

PLACE organizer Kimberly Langston said a community recreation center could address residents' physical, mental, economic and community health.

Much of the momentum for a center stems from several factors, including the closure of St. Mary's Hospital's therapy pool and designs for a center slated in a master plan for Matchett Park.

Additionally, people say they want to go somewhere they feel welcome, to make

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connections with the community, she said.

"The idea that people want to feel connected to their neighbors ... and having a hub for that," Langston said. "... Really the connection piece was an important theme that tied all of these together."

Councilor Barbara Traylor Smith questioned if the group considered whether the public would be willing to pass a tax measure to fund the rec center

project.

"One of my challenges with these feasibility studies — you get them and then it goes on the shelf," Smith said. "They sit on the shelf if there's no funding for them."

Funding may occur through a tax measure or a capital funding campaign, PLACE supporters said.

Over the years, Grand Junction residents have attempted to establish a community recreation center, but multiple efforts have come up short,

including a sales-tax hike in the 1990s.

Langston said PLACE is not trying to recreate a community center like Fruita or Durango or other areas that have developed the facilities.

The goal is to offer the basic amenities that people want, but also to work with partners and tailor a facility to Grand Junction's specific needs.

"We'll get in the trenches and work as hard as we need to get everybody involved in this process that we can," she said.