

2 public meetings set to discuss planned Pacific athletic complex

By Blake Herzog @BlakeHerzog | Posted: Friday, March 18, 2016 9:01 pm

The city of Yuma is holding two informational meetings about the planned Pacific Avenue Athletic Complex, the \$14.2 million project with six softball fields scheduled to open in fall 2017.

The public meetings have been set for 6 p.m. on March 31 and April 14 in the council chambers at City Hall, 1 City Plaza. Both will start with a brief presentation, to be followed by a question and answer session.

City staff and members of the Parks, Arts and Recreation Commission and Public Art Committee will be present, along with representatives of the design firm on the project, Kimley-Horn and Associates.

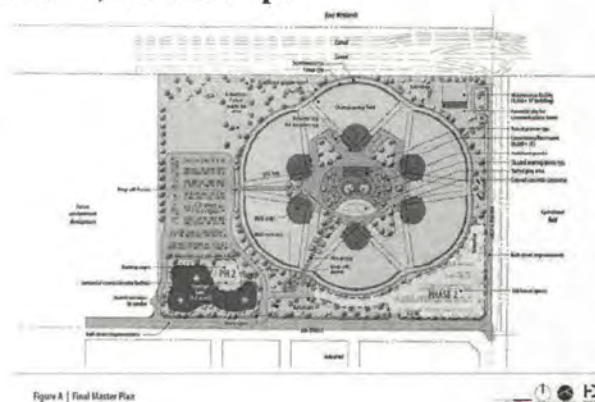
Deputy City Administrator Ricky Rinehart said this week that the design is about 15 percent complete, and the recently-hired architects are getting started on getting into the details of the features that will be included.

“Now that the design contract has been awarded, now is the time to engage everyone, as the process moves forward,” he said.

The designers are pushing through to get to 60 percent completion of the drawings for the 49-acre complex at Pacific Avenue and 8th Street, which of course will then lead to the 100 percent design with all construction details hammered down, almost to the nail.

The project must be completed by the end of August 2017 to be ready for its first tournament, a men’s national softball tournament, that Labor Day weekend, City Administrator Greg Wilkinson said.

The project, being financed by bonds backed by the city’s voter-approved 2 percent hospitality tax, is being touted as a way to relieve overcrowding on local ballfields while attracting more regional tournaments that seek to have a number of fields clustered together, located near hotels and other amenities in the Yuma Palms mall area.



Pacific Avenue Athletic Copmlex

Two public meetings will be held to discuss the planned Pacific Avenue Athletic Complex.

The diamonds are to be constructed to adult softball league standards, and have portable fences that can adapt them to the needs of softball and youth baseball leagues, which don't need as much space, city officials have said.

The Yuma Visitors Bureau, based on statistics gathered from neighboring cities, said a typical 50-team youth softball tournament could bring \$712,000 in new revenue from out of town over a three-day weekend.

In a presentation to the City Council last June, Parks and Recreation Director Debbie Wendt said 23 different softball tournaments were being played at public and private facilities in Yuma, with 12 of those attracting at least some teams from out of town. When the city hosts a sizable tournament it has to be played on fields scattered across the city.

Besides the lighted fields themselves, plans call for the facility to be built in at least two phases and include more than 600 parking spaces, concession stands, restrooms, batting cages, warm-up areas, a playground, 1.7-acre lake, and walking and bicycle trails that connect to the city's existing system.

The project has sparked concerns from some in the community over its cost and what some say has been a lack of public participation in the planning process.

Once city councilmember, Gary Wright, has voted against the bond sale, design contract and other matters involving the park, while Mike Shelton, who joined the council in January, has raised questions during meetings about the public process, cost and whether it meets the definition of parks and recreation facilities that can be paid for out of the 2 percent tax, after voters last extended it in 2009.

Resident and frequent City Council meeting attendee Gilbert Hernandez said he's concerned about the project, even though he likes the idea of it as a former softball coach. "My only problem with it is, they never went out and asked the community about it, just like they did with the baseball field, changing that to a soccer field (at Desert Sun Stadium). I don't ever remember an outpour from the city asking the citizens how we felt about it. Did I miss something along the way?"

Wilkinson has said the idea of a baseball or softball complex on the east side of the city came out of the public process for a recreation facilities master plan in 2006, but input from softball league leaders that the complex should be closer to hotels and restaurants came a few years later, outside of public meetings. The city purchased the current site in 2013 for \$1.62 million.

Hernandez also said he's spoken to other softball players and fans who told him, "Right now, I don't know if it's really going to happen, if they're really going to bring teams in. Why would they come to Yuma when they can go to San Diego, or other places where it's cooler?"

The PAAC clearly has supporters as well, with two of them speaking during the public comment section of the March 2 City Council meeting.

Janice Shultz, a Yuma mom of baseball players and employee of the company which puts on the Dominic Ayala Classic and Cecil Fielder World Series youth baseball tournaments played in Yuma, said, “on average we bring in about 30 teams, with that that brings about 1,552 people, into town, on average, with 1.8 parents, 1.5 kids. We’re also wanting to bring our world series here.

For that on average it’s 100 teams, and that will bring about 5,160 people to town,” she said. The World Series will bring people from more distant states like Texas as well as the ones from Arizona, California and Nevada who attend the smaller monthly tournaments.

Currently the smaller tournaments are competing for space with local teams on existing fields in town, like those at Cibola High School and Kennedy Park.

With the athletic complex, “If you have it in this location, you have the mall, you have the movies, you have the restaurants, you have everything right there,” close to the ballpark, she said.