

Construction of Redlands Youth Clubhouse on Hold

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By Leonor Vivanco

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Officials say work on the long-awaited facility at 1235 Clay St. which would be the first permanent home for the group may not get under way until the end of the year due to issues with the construction bidding process.

"We're right at the cusp. We're turning the corner," said Executive Director P.T. McEwen.

First, the organization must figure out what to do with the one construction bid it received last week at \$2.9 million, about \$600,000 more than was anticipated.

The new facility will mark the first time since 1968 the organization will have a home of its own, have more room and serve more kids.

The club now leases space where its 564 members can go to three sites on Brockton Avenue, the National Guard Armory on Texas Street and in Mentone and participate in arts and sports programs.

In addition to a new teen center, the clubhouse will provide identity and stability because it will be a permanent home and not leased space, McEwen said.

The three sites will stay open once the new clubhouse is built but the armory will be used only for the boxing program.

The club's board of directors will discuss this month whether to accept the sole bid, negotiate the bid, reject it and re-bid the project or scale back the project.

"Something will happen, and the question is what is it going to look like," McEwen said.

"I would love to see what it is that we have approved plans for a first class facility for boys and girls," said project manager Monte Stuck.

Initially, club officials hoped to break ground last month but got off to a slow start soliciting construction bids. Meanwhile, total cost estimates went up \$300,000 to \$3.6 million primarily due to the increasing cost of construction materials, McEwen said.

The total cost estimate, which includes land acquisition and demolition of the site, could reach \$4.2 million if the club accepts the construction bid. The club would look to donors and foundations to raise more money, he said.

If the club takes the bid, ground could move in mid-October, McEwen said. But construction could start in late December or early January should the bid be rejected.

McEwen is hoping for the facility to be built late August or early September 2006.

The site has been cleared since 2004 after the City Council approved the much-debated demolition of the 70-year-old Dutch Reform Church built by settlers in the 1930s.

Some families and children are looking forward to when the clubhouse doors open, said Eddie Flores, chairman of the community-based Northside Impact Committee.

"Overall, people have been patient and not too angry about it," he said. "At this point, they're just concerned about the opening date and whether it's going to open."