

REDLANDS DAILY FACTS – November 18, 2005

Boys & Girls Club fights for a home

Bid for clubhouse construction, originally estimated at \$1.3 million, comes in at \$2.9 million

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REDLANDS Young families aren't the only ones having trouble finding an affordable house in the face of a booming real estate market. After 37 years of making do in temporary locations, the Boys and Girls Club of Redlands is still fighting to raise enough money for a permanent home.

Club board members were disappointed this fall when the only bid to build their Clay Street clubhouse came back at \$2.9 million far beyond the architect's initial guess of \$1.3 million and above even the more recent estimates of \$1.8 million to \$2.3 million.

"We have two choices," Executive Director P.T. McEwen said Wednesday. "A, go raise more money, or B, scale down the project."

So far, club leaders are going with A. Except for a few minor concessions, the club is refusing to compromise on amenities that will probably fill up fast, according to McEwen.

The club already provides afterschool programs for an average of 200 kids from age 6 to 18 each day in three locations: the small Brockton Avenue building, the Texas Street armory site and Mentone Elementary School. There are about 550 members, in addition to participants in limited programs like the boxing classes.

The clubhouse would double the club's capacity by giving around 300 kids facilities like a multipurpose room, health center, teen center, kitchen, computer labs, classrooms and art and music rooms.

Now, the club is looking to hire a construction management firm that will evaluate the costs and provide "an actual cost in today's dollars, not just a shoot-from-the-hip number," said McEwen. While the city will oversee the firm, the county has agreed to pay for the services.

"We have so many irons in the fire at the city that, unless somebody's really cracking the wheels or making some noise, it doesn't get going," said Council

That means that, in the best-case scenario, the club might complete construction by Christmas and open in the first quarter of 2006, McEwen said.

But for that to happen, the group will have to meet the next bids.

They have a total of \$3.2 million in grants and donations, but have spent \$250,000 on the land and just more than \$300,000 on engineering and architectural plans. Furniture and start-up costs could be about \$150,000 each, plus new ongoing costs like insurance and utilities.

City officials know what it's like to finally finish planning and saving up for a project, only to realize that construction costs have outpaced funding.

The renovation of the Mission Gables house at the Redlands Bowl awed planners when the \$530,000 project clocked in at an astounding \$1.3 million last summer. The sports park, which is finally getting under way, was delayed for years while city leaders juggled funding problems with regulations for the endangered San Bernardino kangaroo rat. Earlier plans that had company Big League Dreams building some stadium-style fields were reluctantly scaled back.

"Grants are received or funding programs are established based on original construction estimates with some inflation factor," said Mutter. "But as time goes on and when costs exceed original estimates due to high inflation, funding plans are required to define where the additional money comes from."

The clubhouse project has fought and won other battles.

In 2003, conservationists lobbied to save the vacant 1935 First Protestant Reformed Church that the club had originally planned to renovate. They later decided that repairing and remodeling the building was impractical and would not suit the needs of the club.

The City Council ultimately decided 4-1 to uphold the club's demolition permit.

Club supporters remain hopeful about getting the long-awaited project built.

"Supervisor (Dennis) Hansberger has been so supportive and helpful that I'm confident it will move forward," said Gil, referring to the county's contributions. "It's just the timeline that's making us crazy."