

## **City to sell Heritage Center to PUSD Center will serve as an extension of Santa Fe Elementary School**

**BY MYLES BARKER mbarker@portervillerecorder.com | Posted: Friday, July 6, 2018 6:00 am**

Center will be an extension of Santa Fe Elementary School

**Soon, the Heritage Community Center will be owned and operated by the Porterville Unified School District (PUSD).**

Currently, the City of Porterville owns and operates the center.

At the June 5 City Council meeting, Parks and Leisure Services Director Donnie Moore presented an informational item to council detailing the upcoming sale of the Heritage Center to PUSD, and the district's expected prevalent use of the center this coming school year.

Moore said PUSD approached the City of Porterville, inquiring about possibly purchasing the center to accommodate an increased number of students enrolling the next school year.

"They have taken more kindergarten classes so they are needing more classrooms, and there are a few rooms over at the Heritage Center that they are going to be using as classrooms," Moore said.

Jason Pommier, the public information officer for PUSD, said a big reason for the increase in students is due to the school's dual immersion program, a program dedicated to developing bilingualism/biliteracy, academic achievement, and cross-cultural competencies for all students.

Pommier said being able to purchase the Heritage Community Center is a perfect opportunity for the district to be able to expand the dual immersion program at Santa Fe, which he said has been really successful.

"We wanted to look into expanding the program, which is one of the reasons why we made a bigger push to add a lot more kindergarten students for this year and it is something that we are really looking forward to," Pommier said.

Although there is not a confirmed date as to when PUSD will officially purchase the community center, Pommier said it should be before school starts back up on Thursday, Aug. 9.

"There are still some things that we are working with the City of Porterville on, but we still have about a month to go, so we do have enough time," Pommier said.

Even though Santa Fe will convert several rooms at the Heritage Community Center into classrooms for its students, Moore said another room in the community center, which houses the

city's youth center — a free drop-in recreation center for youth ages 10-18 that provides a wide variety of activities for boys and girls — will stay.

“The youth center is one thing that is going to remain until we have a new location for those kids to go to,” Moore said, adding, “That is a component in the agreement with the school district that the youth center will definitely stay there and will remain open until the city has a new place for the youth center to move to.”

However, because the Leisure Services Division of the Parks and Leisure Services Department has conducted business operations out of the Heritage Center since the opening of the building in November 2005, Moore said staff will have to find another building to use, which he said will most likely be at the Centennial Plaza, which the City of Porterville owns.

“After evaluating several city-owned facility options, leisure services has determined that Centennial Plaza is the best and most practical option to function as the leisure services office due to the available square footage, move-in ready status, and nominal cost to transition,” Moore said. “Its proximity to City Hall is another benefit, as the basement in City Hall is where a significant amount of leisure services special event equipment is stored.”

Such a move is only possible because SM Transit, which has leased a portion of Centennial Plaza for the past three years for \$49,200 per year, has decided not to renew its lease, which expired on June 30 of this year.

Richard Tree, the manager of the city's transit center, said the transit center is currently in a month-to-month extension until he is able to find a new location, which he anticipates will happen by August.

“I am pretty confident that we will be able to move into a new location by August,” Tree said. “We've taken a look at several pieces of property and kind of have a list of the top three, but we really feel that being in close proximity to the Transit Center and City Hall would be the best for SM Transit.”

Tree said the main reason for not renewing the lease at Centennial Plaza is because only half of the space was being used.

“The office location at Centennial Plaza has been great for the last three years for SM Transit, but we weren't utilizing all of the office spaces,” Tree said, adding that only four of the eight office spaces were being used.

Moore said when all four of SM Transit's employees are completely moved out of Centennial Plaza, the city's parks and leisure services staff at the Heritage Center and in City Hall will move in.

“That is the plan,” Moore said, adding that all seven parks and leisure services staff members, “Would all be under one roof and it would just be a lot more efficient to have everyone together.”

However, not only would parks and leisure services staff be under one roof, Moore said the move could also potentially put all three of the city’s full-time IT staff under one roof as well.

“They are spread out a little bit, and so they are looking to be more efficient as well and be in one office space,” Moore said, adding, “The office space that the leisure services administration staff has would be just the right size for them, so that is what they are looking to do as soon as all of this takes place.”

Tree said the month of August is going to be the big move for everyone, and “in the end, I think it is a win-win for everyone.”