

The Pueblo Chieftain

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Council to get second opinion on police station

By Jeff Tucker

The city will spend another \$20,000 on a second opinion regarding the cost of the new Pueblo Police Department headquarters, which has jumped to more than \$30 million according to current estimates.

Council voted 6-0 to approve a contract with Kenny Davis Architects to do a peer review of the work so far on the building.

The city's primary architect is Durrant and Associates, but council has grown increasingly uneasy with the escalating cost estimates on the building.

The city received voter approval to keep \$15 million in extra property tax revenue from the expansion of Xcel Energy's Comanche power plant to pay for the project.

But the latest estimate put the building's cost at \$32 million and prompted council to hold off extending Durrant's contract until the second opinion is submitted.

Council hopes to have that information by Feb. 15 and will review Davis' report at a Feb. 19 work session.

In other action, council approved a rezoning request for a 600-acre project known as Villa Bella east of Colorado State University-Pueblo.

The project, roughly the same size as the city's Belmont neighborhood, is a mixed-use development, which was hailed by the developers and CSU-Pueblo President Joe Garcia as a way to connect the university with the city.

Council's action Monday changed the zoning of the project to a planned unit development. The zoning allows LDM Development the flexibility to build apartments and a retail development near the new football stadium at the university and transition toward single-family homes farther to the east. Maps of the property show a Pueblo Springs Ranch Parkway running along the eastern border of the property. Pueblo Springs Ranch, 24,000 acres formerly known as McCulloch Ranch, is located a few miles to the north.

Pueblo Springs Ranch is expected to file for an annexation of that property this year and LDM is a local partner in the project.

Local resident Ted Freeman objected to the Villa Bella project and repeatedly was cut off by City Council President Barbara Vidmar when he brought up the fact that the Urban Renewal Authority is looking into accepting the property as an urban renewal area.

Doing so will make tax increment financing available to help the developers make infrastructure improvements. Tax increment financing is created by taking the difference between property taxes paid before and after improvements are made to a property.

Council would not allow Freeman to speak about the urban renewal areas, saying it was not part of the rezoning and not germane to the public discussion Monday.

LDM spokesman Jim Munch said the company is considering a special taxing district to pay for public improvements as well.