

Civic center-arena financing proposal explained at forum, reaction favorable

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A trial balloon on reaction to a proposal for building and financing a civic center-arena complex got off to a good flight during a public forum Tuesday night.

Nearly 200 citizens heard Mayor Don Barnett, Larry Owen and Charles E. Donnelly Jr. explain the proposal in detail and answer questions. (See map and stories on page 3).

From comments, questions and an informal poll of the audience, both proposals seemed to have strong support.

Owen is chairman of the Spirit of '76 Committee, a subcommittee of the Rapid City Bicentennial-Centennial Committee. He explained the '76 committee had selected the civic center proposal as one of the prime needs in readying for the city's 100th birthday and the nation's 200th.

Barnett reviewed the progress and development of the current proposal and pointed out there has been a need for such a facility for a long time. He also reviewed past efforts to pass bond issues to build a new center which failed.

The present financing proposal, which has been adopted unanimously by the city council, he pointed out would not require a bond issue and not come from property taxes.

He explained in detail how the revised sales tax would work; giving relief in some areas and placing the burden on those industries which would realize the greatest benefits.

The relief would come with the lifting of the present one per cent city sales tax on groceries and prescription drugs. On the other hand, hotel and motel rooms, restaurant tabs and liquor sales would be increased from one per cent to two per cent.

On all other retail sales, the city sales tax would go to 1.5 per cent during the pay-off period for construction of the facilities.

Owen described the two-building complex and the many uses to which they could be put, pointing out the subcommittee on design had selected the idea of two separate buildings because it is almost impossible to design an arena which could seat 10,000 or more and have

it function satisfactorily as an auditorium or banquet hall.

Donnelly, chairman of the mayor's subcommittee on site selection, reviewed the extensive study made by his committee and the reasons for selecting the location on Omaha, between Eighth and Ninth Streets and on both sides of Rapid Creek.

He referred to the total complex as the "Rapid City Civic Center Plaza," which would have Rapid Creek Park connecting the two buildings.

He also explained that while the location is in what has been a potential flood area, plans are to raise the ground level below the buildings. The locations also are a considerable distance back from the banks of Rapid Creek.

Donnelly added that with the completion of Pactola Dam flood danger along that portion of Rapid Creek has been reduced.

In audience reaction, the problem of enough parking space and traffic congestion seemed to be the questions asked most often. Present plans

call for about 3,800 cars for both facilities.

A youth pointed out that would not be enough for a facility seating 10,000 or 12,000, even with three persons to a car. It was pointed out that overflow parking would be available on streets leading to the facilities and the land could be acquired in the future if planned parking proved inadequate.

As for the problem of traffic congestion, it was pointed out this is a problem wherever large crowds gather, but that traffic control also could be worked out.

Questioning the "saving" for families by lifting the city tax on groceries and drugs was E. H. "Bud" Dail. "Will eliminating the tax on groceries really save anyone anything?" he asked. "Personally I can't see any savings," he added, explaining the elimination of the tax would cause administrative problems for merchants and they would just increase their prices to cover the added cost.

Barnett replied that is a legitimate question and agreed that

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in the beginning administration of the different tax ratios will be awkward for checkout clerks. But it also has been shown that after a little experience with the new system it should not pose any problems.

Stores might have to modify their cash registers, adding another key or symbol, he said, adding that he has discussed this problem with a number of supermarket managers and "they are not pounding on my door."

Barnett also reported that Alderman Earl Hausle, associate professor of economics at South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, had made projections on the potential savings to a family of five or six in which there definitely would be an appreciable savings.

Barnett asked for the support of the voters when the sales tax revision proposal comes up for consideration in the municipal election April 11. Expressing firm belief in the soundness of the proposal he stated, "If we don't have a project that we can take before the people, then we should not be considering it."

The audience was asked to discuss in small groups the proposals as outlined in a brochure and other literature handed out during the meeting, and to report later in the meeting on the results.

Members of the audience also were asked to express their opinion on the financing proposal and the civic center project as outlined.

In a preliminary count of about half the audience, 88 gave a favorable response to the financing proposal, while 8 were opposed. On the civic center project, the vote was 87 in favor to 7 opposed.