Civic center proposition rests on fair, realistic financial plan

This week Mayor Don Barnett will unveil his proposal for financing a civic center.

On the speaking circuit in recent days, Barnett showed special enthusiasm for believing the long-talked-of project actually can be launched in 1972.

After members of the citizens committee which investigated finances return their comments on the mayor's proposal, he will go to the council's legal and finance committee. If it concurs, the civic center could be an item for full council action later this month.

Early in the game, it was recognized that asking people to shoulder financing of a civic center by assessment of their property could doom the project to failure. The subcommittee on financing recommended last fall the property tax was the least desirable option because of the already heavy burden on property owners.

And the assumption this approach would lack public support. That left the possibilities of increasing the city's sales tax by one percent, with a suicide clause when the facility is paid for; a tax on restaurant and bar bills; a room tax on lodging; and a franchise tax on utilities.

Barnett indicated last week that his proposal will include financing by the private sector and it is likely that he also will recommend a combination of taxes other than the property tax.

With pages of study on site, design and financing out of the way, Rapid City is approaching an important decision.

The climate for moving ahead on the civic center appears excellent, particularly if the financial burden is distributed fairly and realistically. The next few days and weeks could be the start of something big.