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FEATURED

Flexibility key in Cornelius art center design

By Ryan James Oct 6, 2016

CORNELIUS – The chairman of a group working to develop an arts center in Old Town made a presentation on its progress to the Cornelius Board of Commissioners at the Monday, Oct. 3, meeting.

“This is much bigger than just an arts and community center,” Greg Wessling, chairman of the Arts and Community Center Strategic Working Group, said. “I think the idea that we can transform downtown Cornelius into something fun and special is really important.”

One of the most significant features proposed by the group is movable walls to allow the center to be versatile and host a wide variety of events.

“The space has to be flexible. We shouldn’t lay down walls and chairs and rooms and stages and say ‘This is it,’” Wessling said. “We found out the more flexible we are, the more likely we’d be to host a lot of different things.”

While the center must rely on fundraising and donations, the ultimate goal is for the facility to be financially self-sustaining, he added.

“Our vision is to empower children and adults alike to create, experience and enjoy virtual and performing arts by providing a flexible facility in our town to serve a broad audience,” Wessling said.

In 2013, the Town of Cornelius received voter approval from a bond referendum for more than \$20 million, with \$4 million designated for an arts and community center.

"We're blessed because Cornelius has a long history of involvement in the arts," Wessling said.

The Arts and Community Center Strategic Working Group visited local and regional art galleries and venues to draw ideas for the Cornelius project.

In order to preserve a historic cotton gin on the lot where the center will be built off Oak Street, the group is planning to incorporate portions of the building into the new facility, although Wessling said the group hasn't determined the specifics yet.

Mayor Pro Tem Woody Washam praised the work of Wessling and the group.

"For me as a musician in the community for the last 50 years, it's been a dream of mine that something of this magnitude could occur in my hometown," Washam said. "I traveled a long distance to get from the traditional theater concept to the flexible theater concept, but I got there. It's been a phenomenal experience."

Ryan James