

# Event center project nears bidding stage

## \$6.8M project could go out for bid in mid-April

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POCATELLO — Now that a local judge has given the Pocatello/Chubbuck Auditorium District permission to bond to fund the construction of its new event center, Raul Cano says construction bid packages could be ready for interested parties by the middle of April.

“The total cost of the project will be approximately \$6.8 million,” said Cano, the Auditorium District’s executive director. “The

### POLL

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winning bidder will have to have a public works license.”

The Auditorium District has been methodical in its approach to building an event center, first spending time on a feasibility study to determine if a center  
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## Center

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was even needed in the Portneuf Valley, and just what niche needed to be filled. With that determination made, the group then sought proposals for the project, settling finally on a six-acre site on Knudsen Boulevard in Chubbuck.

Their initial search was for a partner who would build and own the center and lease it back to the Auditorium District. But Cano said that the more they weighed that option, the more it became clear that wasn’t the route they wanted to go.

“That’s why we sought judicial confirmation, because we felt it was more responsible to own the project, the facility and the land, rather than leasing it,” he said.

Instead of compiling proof of lease payments over the next two decades with no real assets to show for it, the Auditorium District will be paying off bonds that will result in full ownership of the land and facility.

Auditorium District officials sought the judicial confirmation of Sixth District Judge Stephen Dunn, to whom they presented their request in early February. They expected a decision by mid-March, but Dunn was relatively quick, granting the request by the end of last month.

Under the Auditorium District’s plan, they will be bonding with the help of the Chubbuck Development Authority.

Steve Smart, Chubbuck’s public works director and city engineer, told the Journal last month that the Chubbuck Development Authority will be serving simply as “a conduit,” for the Auditorium District to fund construction of

the project. He said the CDA and the Auditorium District are not breaking new ground, but actually following a plan laid out in Boise with a recent project there.

He said the CDA is not paying for the bond and that there are a number of fail-safes put in place that keep the CDA from being liable.

The Auditorium District sought out a partner for the bonding because Idaho Statutes that establish the entities don’t allow all auditorium districts to bond. Gary Cooper, attorney for the Auditorium District, told the Journal last month that the statutes have been amended over the years to allow for districts in areas of lower population to bond, but the population in the Portneuf Valley is far in excess of that ceiling.

The Auditorium District is funded through a 5 percent tax levied on local hotel room sales.

“The facility is being built through the room tax,” Cano said. “This is not being paid for through any other tax other than the room tax.”

In other words, unless you are staying in a hotel room, Bannock County residents are not being taxed for this project or the bond.

Court documents related to the judicial confirmation show that the Auditorium Districts receives approximately \$869,000 annually on average. That’s far in excess of the annual \$545,000 in payments the court documents show the district would pay to the CDA for the bonding.

The Auditorium District plans to build a 40,000-square-foot multi-purpose facility that will focus on the large number of athletic events hosted in the area. Cano said more details about the facility should become available as construction nears.