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CASPER EVENTS CENTER TO BE PRIVATIZED OCT. 1

Private management will assume control of the Casper Events Center starting Oct. 1 assuming City Council approves a contract with Spectra Venue Management at a special meeting next week.

“This is a big deal for the city and for the citizens,” councilman Steve Cathey said at the council work session on Tuesday.

The plan to privatize the region’s largest performance venue began last fall when Spectra reached out, City Manager V.H. McDonald said in March. The city has lost nearly \$1 million per year for the last several years operating the Events Center, McDonald said. But the retirement of longtime building manager Bud Dovala was the impetus to explore turning control over to private hands.

In addition to saving money, Spectra’s potential ability to bring better known acts to Casper given its wider reach drew the city’s interest. The national company already manages venues in nearby states including Pueblo Convention Center in Colorado, the Utah Valley Convention Center in Utah and the Sioux Falls Convention Center in South Dakota.

Dovala told the Star-Tribune in June that privatizing operation of the Events Center was “a great opportunity for the city.”

“[Spectra’s] got a wealth of knowledge in the business,” he said. “I think they’ll land some larger acts.”

The city would retain ownership of the building under the proposed deal.

While the deal is intended to ensure current Events Center employees will keep their jobs under Spectra’s management, Councilwoman Kenyne Humphrey said she had heard many workers were worried about the change.

“I think they’re pretty nervous,” Humphrey said.

But the city’s Leisure Services Director Doug Follick said that Spectra representatives had met with current employees and they had no reason to worry.

“They may be nervous, but they’ve been spoken to,” Follick said.

Dovala noted his concern for employees in the June interview.

“I hope the staff is able to stay,” Dovala said. “We’ve got a great, dedicated staff up here.”

He said his understanding was that Spectra would use its own general manager but leave the remaining staff intact.

While much of the decision-making appears to be completed, Mayor Daniel Sandoval said the council still wants to receive public feedback.

“Whether or not the Events Center should be privately managed — that’s a significant question,” Sandoval said.

If the contract is approved, council would also need to pass a motion to amend the city's budget to account for the deal.