

Pagosa venue: The Pavilion still plans to host songwriters festival and concerts this year

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Moomaw, who did not run for re-election, was succeeded by Michael Whiting who took office Jan. 11.

The Pavilion negotiated to lease the land from Archuleta County for \$1 per year for 10 years with an option to purchase the land any time. The deal also would have required The Pavilion to host at least one event per year. The contingency later was modified, adding a requirement for The Pavilion to sell or donate at least 1,000 tickets per year. There also was speculation the commissioners would amend the terms to five years. The land in question is a proposed site for a county administration/justice center on the Archuleta County Comprehensive Plan.

Janis Moomaw said The Pavilion made the decision not to pursue the lease because of "negative publicity and distortions, not having the full support of the commission, the community being torn apart due to misinformation and not being able to raise money due to unreasonable restrictions by other businesses and nonprofits in town."

"I want to apologize to everyone if we weren't transparent enough," Lucero said to the

standing-room-only crowd at the special meeting. He then addressed Tim Moore of the Pagosa Springs Center for the Arts, another newly formed organization that in November purchased the former Paint Connection building with plans to develop a performing arts center.

"Tim, you came and met with the Pavilion group. We, as commissioners, tried to set up a meeting with all the stakeholders. I thought it was very productive," Lucero said.

But a key stakeholder was missing from that conversation; Folkwest, which has operated the Four Corners Folk Festival in Pagosa Springs for 15 years, providing millions of dollars of economic impact annually. The Pavilion group also never met with members of the Town Tourism Committee, who for the last year have been developing a plan for a venue on Reservoir Hill, site of the folk festival.

A day after withdrawing the lease proposal, Janis Moomaw said in a phone interview that the Reservoir Hill site was not appropriate because it did not have year-round access without the cost of road improvements and snowplowing.

But Crista Munro, executive

director of Folkwest, said those improvements and better access are being discussed by the task force. Reservoir Hill is a Pagosa Springs-owned park. Folkwest has provided approximately \$40,000 worth of improvements to the site over the years, including utilities, grass seed and gravel for the road, in exchange for use of the site for its festival.

"The Pavilion will continue to follow our vision, but we will take a different path," Moomaw said.

"We have had the offer of two pieces of private property. One is downtown and the other is in Pagosa Lakes."

The Pavilion plans to erect a large tent, donated by Kelcy Warren, the new owner of Bootjack Ranch, and CEO of Dallas-based Energy Transfer. The tent eventually would be replaced by a performing arts venue suitable for conferences, conventions and other large events. Warren also is co-founder of Music Road Records, a producer of lyrics-driven folk music. According to *Forbes* magazine, Music Road musicians "are invited to use Warren's two Texas ranches, a Colorado compound (Bootjack Ranch) and an island off Honduras to write and relax."

That's why it was a shock to

Munro to hear about the proposed lease and tent donation from a Folkwest board member in Durango only days before a Jan. 25 meeting, when the lease issue was tabled until the Feb. 8 meeting. Munro declined to identify the board member. While she and Moore were opposed to the "sweetheart deal" The Pavilion was in line to receive, theirs was not a unanimous opinion.

"When everybody weighed in, it was 50 percent for and 50 percent against," Lucero said.

Many who attended the Feb. 8 meeting supported the positive impact The Pavilion would have on the community, while others found the lack of transparency and openness to be suspicious at best. The Pavilion still plans to host an inaugural Songwriters Festival & Symposium on July 8-9, Music in the Mountains concerts in August and an Americana Concert featuring musicians from Warren's music label.

When asked who the audience for the songwriting festival would be, Moomaw responded "anyone who wants to buy a ticket." She said ticket prices would start at \$30 per performance, but her board hadn't decided if there would be a package price or not. They have until April to figure out

their business plan and settle on a location for the tent. That's when Moomaw and Pagosa Springs Community Development Corp. Director Steve Vassallo intend to head out on a tour of eight southern cities with two of the festival's singer-songwriters to promote Pagosa Springs and the event.

Vassallo also claimed that Gov. John Hickenlooper is ardenting the festival and that The Pavilion has received a pledge of \$200,000 in state funding, but the governor's office denies that an invitation was extended and the funding could not be confirmed.

Whichever of the three groups ends up moving forward with a permanent performing arts venue in Pagosa Springs, the commissioners promised to do a better job in the future.

"Communication is a two-way street. We need to be able to listen better, and we need to be able to express the information that we have to you. The county needs to learn how to communicate better, and we will," Commissioner John Ranson said.

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