

COMMENTARY

FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 2008

County fairgrounds must not be sold

I attended the March 25 meeting regarding the future of the Mesa County fairgrounds and the proposed new arena.

I was struck by the push to sell the idea that the fairgrounds are falling apart and underused, that Mesa County can no longer afford to maintain them, that some of the fairgrounds may be sold for development. In addition there is the idea that a proposed downtown, privately owned arena will take over some of the functions of the fairgrounds at "no cost to the taxpayer."

The developer of the proposed new arena repeated the mantra that Grand Junction "needed" this arena if we ever expect to graduate from the lowly status of a town to the prestigious heights of calling ourselves a city, not to mention our "need" for a minor league hockey team. Funny, the developer was the first and only person I've ever heard express these needs. The miraculous snake-oil elixirs of the Old West were promoted in a similar fashion to earlier generations of Grand Valley residents.

First of all, I am dubious about the proposed financing for the new arena. Anything that sounds too good to be true, e.g., "no bonds, no cost to the taxpayers," etc. probably is just that.

Secondly, the public should be very suspicious of any "partnership" between private companies with lots of capital and government agencies on a tight budget. Such partnerships are basically undemocratic and lead to undue influence of the private company and corruption of government

officials. The public ends up on the losing end of the deal.

Thirdly, as a veteran I am offended that Mesa County cannot seem to find the money to maintain a public facility that was originally donated to them by veterans of World War II.

Perhaps the USDA grant promoted by the developer could be better used to maintain and upgrade the present fairground facilities.

Or perhaps Mesa County should do away with the dilapidated facilities altogether and convert the fairgrounds into a top-quality county park with trails, restrooms and additional landscaping. This could be called "Veterans Memorial County Park." Since open space on Orchard Mesa is vanishing rapidly, this would be a wonderful gift to our children, grandchildren and generations to come.

Finally, I am offended at any suggestion that part of the fairgrounds may be sold off and turned into just another development. Not one square inch of the present fairgrounds property should be sold, traded or given up for development! The fairgrounds property is a historical legacy that must remain in the public sector for the recreational use and enjoyment of the public.

JOSEPH HAYES
Grand Junction