

On the Positive Side: Finally, A Breath of Fresh Air

by Frank Bryce

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The long awaited end of a serious issue appears to be approaching a positive stage of resolution at the Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley. Just this past week information was provided that work on the animal shelter's heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems (HVAC) is 99 percent completed. The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico has advocated for these improvements following numerous shelter operational reviews during what can only be described as years of neglect to the failing air system at the shelter in the city owned building. Local resident and animal advocate Emile Bourdet has been diligently monitoring the HVAC work progress and politely prodding the city administration to complete the work since the earnest beginning late last year. Kudos go to Eric Martin, Acting Facility Management Administrator and Tomas Mendez, Acting Design and Construction Services Manager, for the City of Las Cruces for their efforts to get this work done.

With some design missteps along the way, the most recent holdup was ionization filters required as these are not an off-the-shelf item. They are custom made for each unit. These are special filters and they are designed to have a reasonably long service-life. As of this writing, they have been received and installed. As for the operation of the new units, they all have the ability to provide heating and cooling as appropriate year round. These units should reduce disease from air borne pathogens throughout the building by providing an appropriate air exchange about twelve times an hour, reduce stress to animals and improve odor control.

To maintain these units, shelter staff have been or will be trained regarding the removal, cleaning and re-installation of the filters as appropriate along with monitoring the systems operations with a more rigorous maintenance plan. Copies of operation and maintenance manuals will be provided to site staff once this information is received. As a side note, other training has been provided to site staff regarding the operational aspects of the systems.

There remains some question as to how this maintenance program will be overseen by the city staff. To wrap up the project, the contractor is in the process of assembling the closeout documentation for review by the consulting architect prior to submittal to the city for final completion and closeout. Some additional testing and balance checks of the systems are yet to be completed to check that design assumptions are in line with actual performance. These close out procedures will insure engineer design meets the specific space requirements of the areas services by the HVAC.

City staff shared their frustration along with those advocating this needed improvement due the long lead and delivery times for different items and services. Unfortunately, this is apparently occurring on many projects, most likely due to the economic downturn in the past couple of years. I.e., various firms have reduced their staff or capacity substantially and response, etc. has been much slower.

Hopefully, those things will improve in the coming months/years. But for now the animals, the staff and the public can enjoy the breath of fresh air at the shelter.

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