

Rec center repairs estimated at \$2.5M

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Crumbling walls, leaky roofs, moisture damage and an as-of-yet unidentified “biological growth” are among a slew of problems identified at the Taos Youth and Family Center.

Engineers visited the town-owned facility this fall and drafted a 127-page report prioritizing necessary repairs to the building’s exterior walls and roofs, and giving a rough estimate of the repair cost.

In all, the seven major repairs would cost more than \$2.5 million.

The report highlighted several problems at the facility, most of which was built in 1999. The pool was added in 2004.

According to the report, stucco on the east side of the ice rink has separated from the wall and could fall, posing a danger to anyone walking below.

In many cases, the report concludes many problems are related to moisture.

“In our opinion, the general construction of the facility has significant deficiencies in managing moisture that is either generated inside the buildings (pool humidity) or from exterior moisture absorbed through the walls,” the report reads.

The report goes on to say materials used in all three buildings (the pool, main rec center and ice rink) “have weaknesses that are contributing to the problems.”

In one example, the report found interior-grade drywall was used on the exterior of the building and was “failing.”

In all, the report identified five critical issues — testing for mold, replacing stucco on the ice rink’s eastern wall, replacing stucco on the pool, replacing the 21,300 squarefoot pool roof, and making window and wall repairs on the center’s offices.

The estimated cost for that work totals \$1.1 million.

Important but not as urgent repairs cited in the report include additional work to the center’s offices, replacing the ice rink roof and redoing the rest of the rink’s exterior walls.

Those jobs are estimated to cost another \$1.4 million.

The authors of the report emphasize those costs are “rough estimates.” But at this point, the town has nowhere near the money to do most of the fixes.

“We’re looking under the sofa cushions,” said Steve Kennebeck, facilities director for the town, in an interview Wednesday (Feb. 4).

While structural problems at the Youth and Family Center have long been a concern, the report done this fall is the first time town officials have a clear picture of the extent of the damage and what it would cost to fix it. Kennebeck said the report itself cost about \$20,000 and was a necessary first step.

To add to the mounting expense, the report only reviewed the condition of the outside walls and roof. The center will eventually need interior fixes, as well as replacement of major equipment.

Kennebeck said the building may have had some construction defects, but the complete lack of a maintenance plan and budget simply means the town is way behind and now has to catch up.

“A facility as large as this is going to have wear and tear,” Kennebeck said. “What we didn’t have were regular maintenance schedules and a plan for replacements.”

In light of the report’s findings, Kennebeck said a test of the suspect mold is expected to happen later this week. Until the results are in, he said he can’t say if the material is dangerous, and if it is, if any parts of the center will need to be closed.

Kennebeck said the town may be able to move money that was budgeted for a roof repair on a building on Civic Plaza Drive to fix the worst of the ice rink stucco sometime this year. In the meantime, Kennebeck said a fence has been set up to keep people away from any falling debris.

As for the next “critical” item on the list — redoing the pool stucco — Kennebeck said the job could be a candidate for a Community Development Block Grant. The town is eligible for up to \$500,000 a year through that grant, but funding is competitive and not guaranteed.

Kennebeck said it was unlikely any original warranties on construction or materials are still valid, though he said filing an insurance claim could be another source of money to fund repairs.

In addition, there are currently quiet discussions of forming a tax district that would collect a 1 mill levy on property taxes to fund recreation in the community. In theory, the rec center would be a prime candidate for that fund. Such a levy would need to first be approved by voters, and no proposal has yet been made public.