

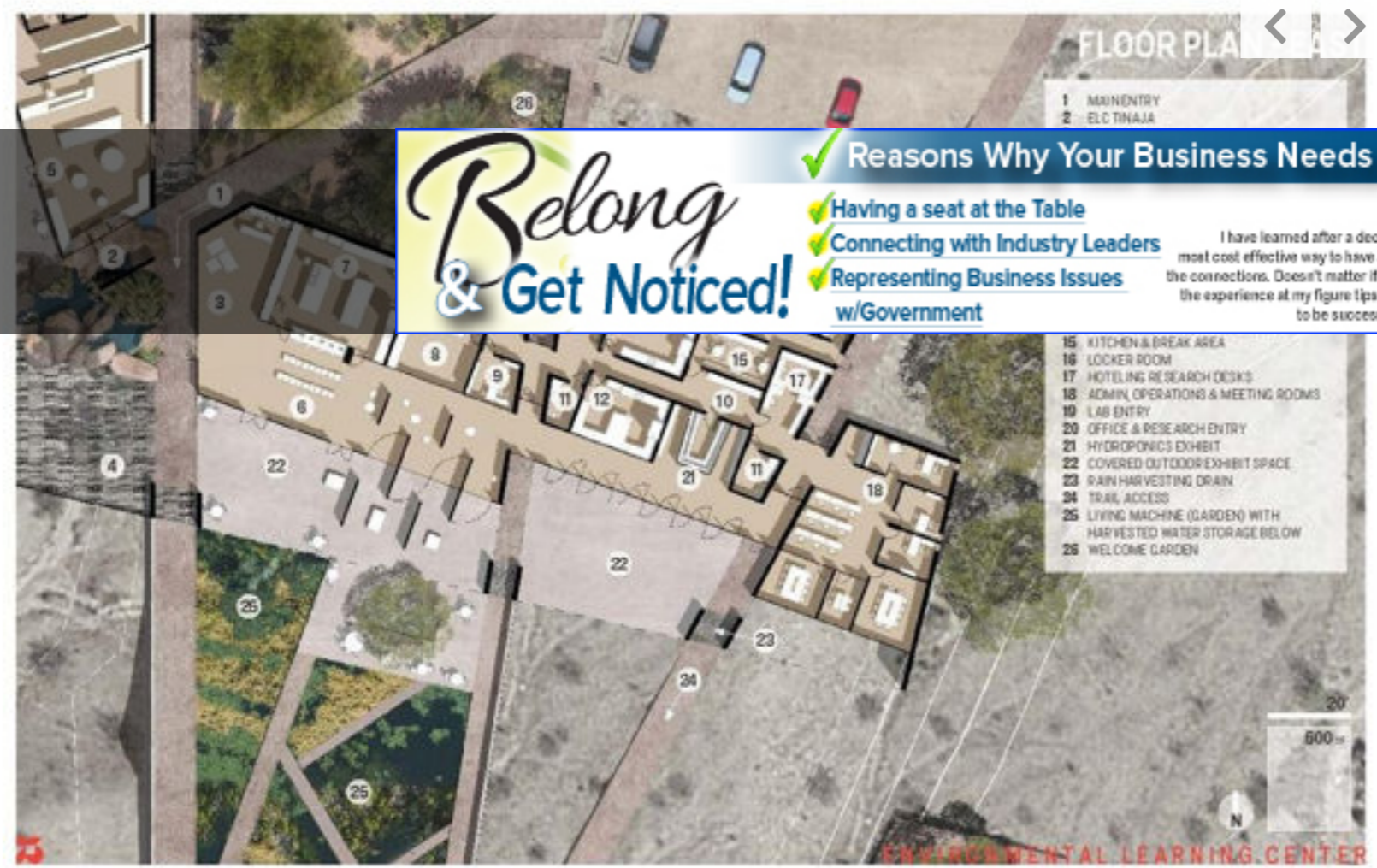


Environmental Learning Center comes into focus

By Michael Zogg
Today's News-Herald Nov 20, 2021 Updated Nov 20, 2021 4



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The Lake Havasu City Council will hear about what has been happening with the Environmental Learning Center at its meeting next week.

The Environmental Learning Center was one of three projects identified as top priorities as part of the Vision 2020 movement that started in 2015 and culminated in Havasu finishing as the runner up in America's Best Communities contest in 2017. As part of the competition, Havasu received \$2 million in prize money meant to serve as seed money to get its plans off the ground. The Environmental Learning Center, which would focus on water related research and testing, was given \$500,000 of that prize money with \$1 million set aside for the Downtown Catalyst Project and \$400,000 for a co-work location which is currently in the works with the name Nomadic.

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Pillar 4, one of five pillars identified as part of Vision 2020, is responsible for overseeing the planning of the Environmental Learning Center. The last time Pillar Four visited the City Council was at its Oct. 22, 2019 meeting when the council voted to approve Pillar Four’s agreement with Jones Studio to create renderings and designs for the project.

Former Lake Havasu City Manager Charlie Cassens, who is also on the Pillar Four team, said those designs were delayed a few month later when covid hit. But renderings and designs of what the estimated \$8 to \$10 million center could look like were completed in July and are ready to present to the public. Cassens said Pillar Four will only be presenting during the public hearing on Tuesday, and is not requesting anything from the council that would require a vote.

Cassens said he plans to give a PowerPoint presentation to the council to show them the concept designs for the first time, as well as talk about what the next steps are for the project.

“We are very tickled with the product that the consultants came up with,” Cassens said. “We think it is a very innovative design – it is very creative. During the meeting we will talk more about how this design concept has grown. At this point we are very pleased with what we have in hand, and we are anxious to get on to the next step – which is building the organization.”

The Environmental Learning Center project is planned to be built in the Havasu Rivera area, and Cassens said the project would be providing something that has never been done before – at least not on the Colorado River.

“Twenty to 40 million people depend on the Colorado River,” Cassens said. “This facility is dedicated to monitoring the water quality that is in the Colorado River. Most all of the attention, history, around the Colorado has been about the quantity – who gets how much, when, and how the water is distributed. But there is really not a lot of overarching attention paid to the quality of the water that is in the river, and the overall health of the river. That is what this facility is designed to focus on.”

According to project documents, the vision for the center is a “green” facility focused on education, research, and public gatherings with a specific focus on collecting and disseminating data and knowledge relative to water in the Southwest. The document says the facility and grounds will be open to the public, and the hope is to include multiple government agencies, water authorities, special districts, schools, universities, and Lake Havasu City among the facility’s users.

The document produced by Jones Studio is the clearest vision yet for what the Environmental Learning Center could be, with detailed layouts that include gardens, parking, trails, and layouts for the actual building. The designs for the building itself include spaces for chemistry, micro biology, and research labs, a hydroponics exhibit, rain harvesting drains, a gift shop, restaurant, an event gathering space and more.

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But Cassens cautioned that these are still just a vision for the project, and plans are still subject to change between now and whenever construction documents are actually drawn up.

“It is not set in stone, these are concept renderings,” Cassens said. “The concepts are based on a design that is thought to blend into the landscape. We have also designed it to be a green facility that is generally a net zero on water and energy. So what you see there is kind of the vision – it is not the ultimate plan. One of the first phases of fundraising would be to raise the money to get the actual plans drawn up.”

Cassens said changes to these renderings and designs would likely come during the fundraising phase of the project as agencies and organizations interested in potentially using and helping pay for the facility dig into more of the specifics of what they would need.

“Once the building plans are drawn up, it costs money to change those plans,” Cassens said. “Right now it is just a concept. It is a vision, and it is very malleable at this point.”

Although fundraising efforts will hopefully kick off before too long, Cassens said Pillar Four still has some work it needs to do before it would be able to accept donations or contributions even if they are offered.

“Basically, that means setting up a foundation with a board of directors, bylaws and all that,” Cassens said. “We would get a non-profit 501c3 status with the IRS because a lot of the grants that are available federally are only available for 501c3 organizations. We will set up a marketing plan, a business plan, and set up the banking mechanisms so we have all of that ready to go when we have someone that may want to step up and help fund the project.”






Once a non-profit organization is set up to take the reins from Pillar Four, fundraising for the project will be able to move forward. And fundraising has always been an important part of the plans for the Environmental Learning Center. Pillar Four has told the city that its goal is to raise enough money to cover all of the construction costs of the project without any additional money from the city itself.

Cassens said during the feasibility study and cost analysis completed in phase one of the project, the center is expected to cost between \$8 and \$10 million to build, and about \$1.3 million per year to operate. Cassens did note that those estimates were completed a couple years ago, and a lot has changed in the world since then that may affect those estimates.

Cassens said he is already starting to look ahead to the fundraising portion of the project. He said he has recently been researching grant opportunities for such a facility and is excited about what he has found.

“There are a lot of grant opportunities that go uncollected in want of a project like this. So I am anxious to get the fundraising part of it underway because I think we will be surprised at the availability of funds that are looking for a project like this.”

The City Council meeting is scheduled to begin Tuesday at 6 p.m. inside the council chambers, located at the police facility on 2360 N. McCulloch Blvd.


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Photos: Environmental Learning Center plans

Updated Nov 20, 2021  0

These are designs and visions for the Environmental Learning Center project.

Tags

- Charlie Cassens
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Michael Zogg

Reporter



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1947 Nov 21, 2021 7:08pm

The center is a back back back burner waste of money!

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shutthefrontdoor Nov 21, 2021 11:45am

First, why didn't the previous City Manager stay retired! This from 2108! "So now we are getting ready to put a firm on contract, Jones Studio, Inc., a mid-sized architecture, interior design, graphic design, public art, and planning firm for Phase I to supply a design of a facility, they design!, that's what they do! Where does the economic "analysis" come from? and what requirement does that satisfy? Does it serve to determine if we can afford the facility proposed? The Environmental Learning Center I assume already has a "Mission Statement" and "Goals" so let us cut to the chase without all the extraneous verbiage, what are we buying here for \$206,680 (or has the price gone up since 2018?) and how does that task differ from the Phase II master planning/conceptual design, permitting requests, program schedule and marketing tools package?? Plus an Economic Analysis and Report has already been accomplished for the Riviera, so is that phase of Phase I a double dip into

the finances? Wonders never cease!"

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3pinsel7 Nov 21, 2021 11:10am

Does anyone remember the boondoggle of the cultural center on the island? Not to mention the Aquatic center that no one voted for? What a waste of good money when we should be doing more to secure water for our town!

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shutthefrontdoor Nov 21, 2021 9:49am

"Few things can better reduce stress or shed light on truth than a good joke." Purchase a gym with \$3,509,527 spent so far then find out we need \$7mil to complete the all work for the new municipal courthouse! The Downtown Catalyst project, originally a 3 year, \$504,000 plan to boost the image of Main Street. The previous mayor with his "magic 8 ball" predicted breaking ground by the summer of 2018! The Main Street Association cannot raise enough money to complete or tear down that rusting landscape blight hovering over the Blvd . . . "da Arch de Havasu" and the gateway to tattoo, pawn and gun shops, taverns and saloons and a gas station no less another investment, the proposed "community gathering center" on land we purchased for \$1.2 mil! Add to this mix, the Environmental Learning Center at \$8-10 mil with a \$1.3 mil annual operating budget. We already have water that cannot be drawn from our house faucets, don't look now but we are in the middle of a drought with a Hexavalent Chromium problem along the Colorado shore in Topock which will take 30-40 years to clean up. On top of this we are talking 2021 dollars, so when and if shovels ever break ground to see the these visions come to fruition what unimaginable costs are we really looking at, especially with this cities lack of due diligence on any project! Of course we have the cover your rear cautionary statement, "still just a vision for the project, and plans are still subject to change between now and whenever construction documents are actually drawn up. This "vision" requires a mandatory visit to the optometrist or Carnac the Magnificent!

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Be Nice. No racism, sexism or any sort of -ism that is degrading to another person.

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