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Cornelius board discusses plans for arts, recreation centers

by Ryan James Aug 18, 2016

Town commissioners listened to presentations about an arts center being planned downtown as well as a proposed regional recreation center that could serve North Mecklenburg residents at their meeting on Monday, Aug. 15.

Troy Fitzsimmons, Cornelius director of Parks, Arts, Recreation and Culture, discussed an effort to petition Mecklenburg's Board of County Commissioners for a recreation center that would serve Cornelius, Davidson and Huntersville.

"Quite frankly, we are maxed out in terms of recreational needs," Fitzsimmons said.

A joint park commission meeting was held on Aug. 8 in which officials from Cornelius, Davidson and Huntersville gathered to discuss common issues. The purpose of the meeting was to pass a resolution to support the funding of a regional recreation center.

Fitzsimmons said that the town boards in Davidson and Huntersville agreed to consider similar resolutions. The towns will send three separate and one joint resolution to the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners.

At the Cornelius Town Board pre-meeting, the chairman of the Arts Center Strategic Working Group said the town will need financial contributions beyond what's already been invested in the property and the \$4 million bond set aside for the arts center.

Chairman Greg Wessling said the group will submit a plan to the Cornelius Town board for

approval.

"Whether we build it all at once if we can or in stages if we have to, it probably won't be everything," Wessling said.

There could be a lot of opportunity for contributions from the community, Wessling said, because of the number of people wanting to help Cornelius grow.

"There are a lot of folks who really want to see good things happen here in Cornelius. You might not be driven by a passion for an arts center but perhaps by passion for an arts district in Old Town Cornelius," Wessling said.

Mayor Pro Tem Woody Washam said the arts center and eventual development of an arts district could be an economic catalyst for the town.

While he said it isn't up to the town board to create the personality of such a district, it's important for town leaders to "drive the train forward."

"I would be interested in putting staff to work and getting some experts involved to figure out how to put this together," Washam said. "I think it's a no-brainer; it just fits with everything else we've been doing. The bottom line is development is going to happen once that building goes up. We won't put up a multimillion dollar building in Cornelius and not see development go up around it."

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