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TCC ARENA WILL SEE MAJOR RENOVATIONS

by Teya Vitu

New life is being infused into the Tucson Arena at the Tucson Convention Center. The TCC is the centerpiece of the Rio Nuevo District, and now will have \$6.5 million in improvements – the largest renovation the Arena has seen since it opened in November 1971 with the Ice Capades and an Ike and Tina Turner concert.



A prior \$1 million project gave the Arena new seating in Section 100 in September 2012. That city-funded project was the largest dollar investment in the arena to date until these proposed improvements funded by the Rio Nuevo Multipurpose Facilities District.

Right now, officials are figuring out which Tucson Arena improvements can be carried out with the available funding. Rio Nuevo owns the TCC and Arena and the City is the tenant and manages the property.

A wish list of Arena “needs and repairs” was presented March 18 to the Rio Nuevo board. This includes seating, chairs, scoreboard, sound system, ceiling tiles and concrete floors, lights, restrooms, and concessions stands.

Cost estimates have not yet been included, but by April 15, dollar figures should be added to the line items so that the Rio Nuevo board can prioritize.

“Obviously, everyone is talking about the bathrooms, concessions and seats,” said Fletcher McCusker, who chairs the Rio Nuevo Board.

The goal would be to start work by late summer, said Elaine Weaver, lead planner in the City’s Architecture and Engineering Division.

The Arena is booked throughout the next year, so renovation work will have to be squeezed between events.

“I hope it’s done quick enough so people do notice,” McCusker said. “It needs to be a year project.”

The bathroom work would include new toilet partitions, mirrors, paint, lights and trash receptacles. Touchless toilet flushing, soap dispenser and paper towel dispensers would replace the manual equipment now in place, Weaver said.

“It needs to be a better fan experience,” McCusker said. “The bathrooms are disgraceful. The concession area is 40 years old.”

Weaver toured the TCC site last year, met with management and staff, and with City Councilmember Steve Kozachik. That led to the list of needs and repairs for the TCC and Arena.

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Weaver joined the City seven months ago from WSM Architects, where she was the project architect for the new Tucson Police Department crime lab. Weaver is collaborating on the Tucson Arena with private sector architect Phillip Swaim, who has drawn concept designs for a new arena and also worked on the new UNS Energy headquarters.

The Arena renovations are a direct result of Rio Nuevo and the City settling three lawsuits in February that had mired any Rio Nuevo progress for three years.

A separate Tucson Convention Center project started in November to replace five elevators, an escalator and a stage lift. It is the first phase in what will eventually replace all elevators and escalators at the TCC. The first phase should be completed by the end of the year, Weaver said.

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