

City awaits history center study

BY WAYNE BRYAN STAFF WRITER

TRI-LAKES AREA — City officials and community leaders in Arkadelphia are waiting to see if a proposed history museum or cultural center would be possible and practical.

A preliminary report on a study by Cromwell Architect Engineers Inc. may be available to the town as early as the end of the week, City Manager Jimmy Bolt said.

“It is a feasibility study to see if we should move forward to the full report or if it is just a dream that won’t work,” he said.

The Cromwell study is the result of a \$14,000 grant from the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism and \$20,000 from Southern Bancorp.

“The city is taking a lead on the project, but it is not costing the citizens,” said Carrie Roberson of the bank’s Arkadelphia office.

The proposed development would be near a bluff overlooking the Ouachita River. The site, 120 feet over the river, is in an area once inhabited by the Caddo people.

“It looks much like it probably was when the Indians were here,” Roberson said. “There could be trails that would connect with the city’s trail system.”

One of the proposals, Roberson said, would be a history museum covering pre-Columbian culture to Arkansas through the 1800s.

“We’re in the very early stages of the project,” she said.

One of the major exhibitions for any museum created there would be artifacts of the Caddopeople, who lived in the Arkadelphia area until about 1700.

A collection of items from the area is held by the Joint Educational Consortium, a partnership between Henderson State University and Ouachita Baptist University. The collection is overseen by Mary Beth Trubitt, a professor at HSU.

“There has been a lot of discussions of what this center would look like,” she said. “An idea is that there would be items on a long-term loan to the cultural center.”

Trubitt and Arkadelphia officials have held meetings with leaders of the Caddo Nation in Binger, Okla., about the use of some of the artifacts.

“We have met them several times,” Bolt said. “We have talked about the control over these objects. We will work closely with them. This would be living history. We would let people know there is still a Caddo Nation.”

Trubitt said the Native Americans are concerned about how the items would be treated and interested in how their history would be interpreted.

Items from the consortium’s collection are already on display at each university, the Clark County Historical Museum and The Ross Foundation, a philanthropic organization in Arkadelphia.

This is not the first time artifacts and the bluff site have been the subjects of a study. In 1972, a project for a museum at the site was proposed with the support of then-OBU President Dan Grant. The Audubon Society did a study on the proposed project, but no action was taken.

There is concern that the bluff is unstable and unfit for development.

“Erosion of the bluff is obvious,” Roberson said. “We were standing there with the architect on Feb. 2 looking at the bluff when a tree fell in the river.”

Blot said there would be no development close enough to the river to put a project at risk, but it would preserve the natural setting.

Trubitt guessed that this time, the project might succeed.

“There have been a lot of people who are interested in something like this happening,” she said. “There is more organization and energy involved now.”

“The project has merit,” Roberson said. “The key is finding significant resources to make it a reality.” - wbryan@arkansasonline.com

This article was published February 25, 2010 at 3:49 a.m.
Tri-Lakes, Pages 57 on 02/25/2010