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Town-hall meeting held on planned expo center

By Juliana Mathews/newseditor@gonzalescannon.com

In February the City Council authorized the City of Gonzales to build an Expo Center.

Harold Hansen, Sr. Consultant at VenuWorks, the firm contracted to oversee the convention center project, offered a brief overview of the proposed project and asked for feedback from the audience during a town-hall meeting at Gonzales Junior High on Tuesday.

Preliminary ideas place a 40-50,000 s.f. single-story building at JB Wells Arena, to the west of the entrance road, in the area bordered by 197.

A survey of stakeholders returned requests for a large, entertainment venue, banquet rooms, a trade show venue, a patio/concession, and divided meeting rooms, all ranging from 750 s.f. to 39,000 s.f. As no plans have been drawn, the actual size and cost of the project is currently unknown, and final uses are undetermined.

When asked for a ballpark figure of how much the smallest of the meeting rooms might cost to rent, Hansen said, "Nothing is known until we complete the performa."

City Manager Allen Barnes said, "It will be market-competitive for this area. We have to keep it priced for people in this community."

Tensions ran high when concerns were raised about flooding in the area. Studies have not yet been done to determine whether or not flooding is a factor.

Some citizens also expressed a desire to have the center at a different location saying, "I think JB Wells was meant to be a park, with trails and not this."

"Some day the Eagle Ford Shale will go away. We need to diversify our economic base to keep the hotels full," said Barnes.