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A R I Z O N A

Daily Sun

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A bright bowl

Vibrant tortellini soup **A8**



Hop into spring

Bunnies at the table **B5**



1...2...3... Grizzlies

FHS senior Taylor marks third Adams State soccer signing **SPORTS, B1**



JAKE BACON, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

STILL DIGGING OUT
John Kondratuk runs his snowblower along the sidewalk in front of his Cheshire home Tuesday morning in the middle of a heavy snowstorm. Despite it being the second day of spring, winter still had a firm hold on northern Arizona.



RACHEL GIBBONS, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

CHANGE OF PLANS
Grace Linwood snowboards down a small hill at Foxglenn Park under the supervision of her father Simon Linwood Tuesday morning. The Linwood family had planned to visit the Grand Canyon Tuesday, but changed their plans due to the limiting views and roadway conditions caused by the storm.



RACHEL GIBBONS, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

WALKING IN A WINTER WONDERLAND
Alicia Formanack and her dog Estrella take a snowy walk through the Sunnyside neighborhood in Flagstaff Tuesday morning.

FLAGSTAFF MEDICAL CENTER

Zoning meeting set for campus

ABIGAIL KESSLER
Sun Staff Reporter

At its Wednesday, March 22 meeting, the City of Flagstaff's Planning and Zoning Commission will be discussing whether to approve a proposed specific plan and zoning map amendments for Northern Arizona Healthcare's (NAH) Health and Wellness Village, which includes the new Flagstaff Medical Center (FMC) campus.

The proposed Health and Wellness Village is planned to be constructed on 172.6 acres next to Ft. Tuthill County Park, which NAH already owns. It will be constructed in stages, beginning with a new hospital and ambulatory care center (ACC).

"Future expansions include a surgery center expansion,

Please see **ZONING**, Page A6

Report looks at economic benefits of AZ higher ed

ABIGAIL KESSLER
Sun Staff Reporter

Education Forward Arizona and the Helios Education Foundation recently released a report on the economic benefits of higher education in Arizona, which found that increasing levels of education had a positive financial impact at both the individual and state level.

The report, called "Billions to Gain: The Economic Benefits of Investing in a More Educated Arizona," used a model to project how higher education would affect a cohort of Arizona public high school graduates (68,690 total) across their lifetime.

It then looked at the economic benefits of varying levels of higher education in three categories: individual, social and fiscal impacts.

"We're getting beyond the value of college to just be

Please see **EDUCATION**, Page A6

SC seems split in Navajo water rights case

JESSICA GRESKO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court seemed split Monday as it weighed a dispute involving the federal government and the Navajo Nation's quest for water from the drought-stricken Colorado River.

States that draw water from the river — Arizona, Nevada and Colorado — and water districts in California that are also involved in the case urged the justices to rule against the tribe. Colorado says siding with the Navajo Nation will undermine existing agreements and disrupt the management of the river.

But, arguing on behalf of the Navajo Nation, attorney Shay Dvoretzky told the justices that the tribe's current water request is modest. The "relief that we are seeking here is an assessment of the nation's needs and a plan to meet them," he said.

Arguing on behalf of the Biden administration, attorney Frederick Liu said that if the court were to side with the Navajo Nation, the federal government could face lawsuits from many other tribes.

Four of the court's justices, including its three liberals, seemed

Please see **WATER**, Page A6



FELICIA FONSECA, STAFF, AP

Phillip Yazzie waits for a water drum in the back of his pickup truck to be filled in Teesto, Ariz., on the Navajo Nation, on Feb. 11, 2021. The Supreme Court appears to be split in a dispute between the federal government and the Navajo Nation over water from the drought-stricken Colorado River. The high court heard arguments Monday in a case that states argue could upend how water is shared in the Western U.S. if the court sides with the tribe.



SHOVELING,
SHOVELING,
SHOVELING

Above: Jovany Martínez shovels the sidewalk around his Sunnyside home Tuesday morning as snow falls yet again on Flagstaff.

RACHEL GIBBONS, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

SIX WHEEL DRIVE
NOT ENOUGH

Right: A Starship food delivery robot sits trapped in the snow Tuesday morning after driving off the snow on South San Francisco Street at Northern Arizona University.

JAKE BACON, ARIZONA DAILY SUN



Water

From A1

sympathetic to the tribe's case. But other conservatives including Justice Samuel Alito were skeptical during nearly two hours of arguments at the high court.

Alito asked about “some of the real world impacts” of the decision and suggested he’d seen figures indicating that “per capita water on the Navajo Nation is greatly in excess of per capita water for residents of Arizona.” He pointed out that the Navajo Nation’s original reservation was hundreds of miles away from the section of the Colorado River it now seeks water from.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh also asked about the potential consequences of siding with the Navajo Nation, pointing to a brief that said more water for the tribe would necessarily mean less water for Arizona, striking “at the heart of the social and economic livelihood” of the state “with dire consequences.”

The facts of the case go back to two treaties the tribe and the federal government signed in 1849

and 1868. The second established the reservation as the tribe’s “permanent home” — a promise the Navajo Nation says includes a sufficient supply of water. In 2003 the tribe sued the federal government, arguing that it had failed to consider or protect the Navajo Nation’s water rights to the lower portion of the Colorado River.

A federal trial court initially dismissed the lawsuit, but an appeals court allowed it to go forward.

“Is it possible to have a permanent home, farm and raise animals without water?” Justice Neil Gorsuch asked at one point during arguments, suggesting sympathy for the tribe’s case.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, participating in the case via telephone because she wasn’t feeling well, said the government was making the argument that the Navajo Nation can’t do anything to force the government to protect its water rights, something she suggested would have been an “odd agreement” for the tribe to make.

The Colorado River flows along what is now the northwestern border of the tribe’s reservation, which extends into New Mexico, Utah and Arizona. Two of the riv-

er’s tributaries, the San Juan River and the Little Colorado River, also pass alongside and through the reservation. Still, a third of the some 175,000 people who live on the reservation, the largest in the country, don’t have running water in their homes.

The federal government says it has helped the tribe secure water from the Colorado River’s tributaries and provided money for infrastructure including pipelines, pumping plants and water treatment facilities. But it says no law or treaty requires the government to assess and address the tribe’s general water needs. The states involved in the case, meanwhile, argue the Navajo Nation is attempting to make an end run around a Supreme Court decree that divvied up water in the Colorado River’s Lower Basin.

A decision in the case is expected by the end of June when the Supreme Court typically breaks for its summer recess.

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Zoning

From A1

additional bed tower and an emergency department expansion,” said a city staff report included in the agenda. “At full build out, the hospital will consist of more than 1.1 million gross square feet (or 25.25 acres) of development with up to 448 beds.”

Later stages will build out the surrounding health village, which is currently planned to include 315 housing units, a variety of restaurant and retail options, an outdoor Wellness Retreat and space for medical research.

Construction on the project is expected to take 23 years to complete, according to the specific plan.

Specific plan

Wednesday’s agenda related to NAH’s plans will begin with discussion of the project’s specific plan.

A specific plan is meant “to provide a greater level of detail for a geographic area or element of the regional plan and to provide for the systematic implementation of the regional plan,” according to the report.

“...These plans are necessary to further determine the nature and scale of activity centers, corridors and neighborhoods, the cross-sections and alignments of future corridors and the priority of goals and policies in a particular area,” it says.

In addition to a detailed outline of the new campus, the specific plan for this project includes impact analyses on how traffic, wildfires and fire service, and economics (among others) would be affected by the project, and letters from the police department and school district along the same lines.

It also includes community feedback from the public participation process, with over 350 letters commenting on the project.

In the meeting agenda, city staff recommended forwarding the specific plan to city council with a recommendation to adopt, though with a list of 13 conditions to be met first.

The conditions included in Wednesday’s agenda range from the project’s development closely matching what is in the specific plan to revising a number of particular details within the plan itself.

Items added to the plan in the latter category include the transportation improvements recommended in the traffic impact analysis (TIA), a “high-quality public amenity that serves as an active recreation feature” as part of the wellness retreat and a curb and gutter next to a bike lane and buffer on the east side of Beulah Boulevard.

It also recommended relocating the sewage collection system and paving a section of trail between the campus and Lake Mary Road while bringing it to the same height as Beulah for better visibility.

The ninth item on this list has to do with revisions to the phasing of traffic construction that needs to be done on the project.

In the first phase, Beulah will have 11 foot travel lanes with the aforementioned curb, gutter and bike lane on the east side and a pedestrian crossing with beacons will be established at the parking garage. This phase also includes designing Beulah’s intersection with Purple Sage Trail and grading it to allow for a future underpass of I-17, which will need to be approved by both the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and the city engineer.

Phase two changes focus on traffic control, with six intersections needing to be designed and graded for a future signal and requiring revisions to the original TIA based on traffic after phase one’s completion. This phase’s TIA will also include a study of another pedestrian crossing at Purple Sage and Getaway Trail, though construction is not part of it.

Zoning map amendment

A similar list of conditions is provided for the second item related to FMC’s new campus on the agenda for Wednesday, the zoning map amendment.

If approved, 98.39 acres will be changed from rural residential and estate residential to highway commercial and public facilities for phase one of the project.

In the agenda, city staff recommended sending the item to Flagstaff City Council, with the inclusion of 11 conditions. As with the specific plan, the majority have to do with traffic construction, also includes the requirement for design and construction of the Beulah/Purple Sage intersection, for example.

Transportation improvements, both on and off site, will need to be completed before any certificate of occupancy is issued for

the property. Intersections will need to be “protected intersections” for the safety of those on foot or bike and the Cosmic Ray Tunnel will be reconstructed to accommodate the changes to Beulah

Other requirements have to do with different areas of the project: NAH will need to provide at least a 20-minute public shuttle service to the nearest transit stop and a ladder company will be relocated to Fire Station 6 or a new fire station nearby, if the current station cannot accommodate it.

The final condition is that “if the property is rezoned and the applicant fails to obtain final civil plan approval within two years of the effective date of the rezoning ordinance, then the city may schedule a public hearing before the city council for the purpose of causing the zoning on the property to revert to the former classification of rural residential and estate residential.”

Project history

NAH first announced its plans in April 2021, saying FMC had outgrown its current campus and did not have room to expand in that location. That campus, a 242-bed hospital built in 1936, is Arizona’s only level 1 trauma center north of Phoenix and, according to NAH, 25% smaller than benchmarks for modern facilities.

At the December meeting, Steve Eiss, NAH’s vice president for construction and real estate development, said the hospital had referred 5,600 patients to other locations in the past year — due to a lack of capacity rather than the ability to provide needed service.

In 2021, NAH said it planned to open the hospital and ACC in 2026 and 2024 respectively, and to break ground in September 2022.

The project is currently still moving through the city’s approval process. At a neighborhood meeting held in October 2022, it outlined four planned phases for construction, beginning in the second quarter of 2023. In this plan, the first phase (completion of hospital and ACC) would go through 2027 and the final phase would finish in 2040.

NAH held its first community meeting on the project in February 2021 and continued holding meetings through October of the next year. By the end of this process, it had held about 120 meetings with residents near both locations, the city and county and a variety of organizations (Mountain Line and the Arizona Nurses Association are two examples). About 900 property owners were notified in this process, as were six nearby homeowner’s associations.

Common areas of concern brought up in the meetings were transit and access to the new campus, use of FMC’s current campus, noise issues, environmental impacts and building height, the participation plan noted.

Themes of support listed in the plan included economic development, access to care, new health services and the “health and wellness vision” expressed in the overall plan.

The plan mentions that NAH has received 295 letters in support of the project, six letters of concern and 60 with questions.

Three of those community meetings (two in January 2022 and one in Oct. 2022) were a mandatory part of the city’s approval process. A regional plan amendment was then approved by P&Z and city council at the end of 2022.

The amendment included four changes to the city’s 2030 regional plan: changing the place type designation of a future suburban activity center to a regional rather than neighborhood scale and moving its center to FMC’s proposed location. It also changed the area type designation of a 28-acre section of the property and adjustments to the plans for Beulah Blvd.

Planning and Zoning heard these amendments in November 2022 and unanimously moved to forward them to city council. The council heard the amendments the next month, with discussion focusing more on the project itself and potential concerns, particularly transportation at the new site. Council also ended up approving the amendments, though with a dissenting vote from councilmember Austin Aslan.

This week’s zoning meeting will now be discussing NAH’s plans specifically, deciding whether to send them to the city council for approval.

The Planning and Zoning meeting begins at 4 p.m. on Wednesday. It can be attended in-person at City Hall (211 W. Aspen Ave.), or online at flagstaff.az.gov/1461/Streaming-City-Council-Meetings.

To learn more about the project, visit nahealth.com/expansion.

Education

From A1

personal gain for an individual and this research puts into context the specific economic gains to our state, to our communities,” said Paul Luna, president and CEO of Helios. “...This starts to provide a very strong case as to why equal opportunity, equal access for every student to go to college is relevant and important to each and every one of us that lives in the state of Arizona.”

The report found that high school graduates will earn on average \$679,000 over their lifetime, while those completing an associate’s degree will earn \$966,000 and bachelor’s degree recipients will earn \$1,531,000 — almost two and a half times more.

Social and fiscal impacts have to do with different aspects of the way college education can have a broader effect, particularly at the state level. Savings on health and criminal justice expenses are examples of the former, while federal and local tax impacts fall into the latter category.

Individually, the report found, those with a bachelor’s degree will contribute \$982,680 more in social gains and \$356,200 in fiscal gains than a high school graduate over the course of their life.

Per cohort, a 10% increase in college completion will result in \$1.37 billion in social impacts and \$0.52 billion in fiscal impacts, while a 20% increase in college enrollment will result in a \$5.09 billion social impact and a \$1.82 billion fiscal impact.

“The model doesn’t say whether college completion is a more important goal than college enrollment,” said Clive Belfield, a professor of economics with Queens College, City University of New York. “It says, either way, college enrollment or college completion, you’re going to get a billions of dollars magnitude effect if you

Proposed uses for
the new campus

Here are some of the things that will be included in the Health and Wellness Villages, as proposed in the specific plan.

- New hospital:** 751,850 square feet. 276 beds in phase one, expanding to 448 by end of construction
- Ambulatory care center:** 205,042 square feet
- Commercial, retail and lodging:** 290,000 square feet
- Research and development:** 250,000 square feet
- Parking garage:** 472,800 square feet

can bring about those increases.”

In Flagstaff, the report found that a 10% increase in college completion would result in an additional \$5.82 million social impact (\$9,310 per individual) and a \$1.6 million fiscal impact per cohort (\$2,560 per graduate). Increasing college enrollment 20% would add \$3.89 million in social impact (\$62,250 per high school graduate) and \$12.23 million in fiscal impact (\$19,580 per graduate) for each cohort.

A 20% decrease in college readiness, however, would result in a loss of \$68.72 million in social impacts per cohort (\$109,980 per graduate) and \$21.86 million fiscal loss per cohort (\$34,990 per individual).

The COVID-19 pandemic also created losses in college readiness and attainment (due to a combination of lost schooling and reduced productivity from multiple causes) which the report also analyzed through an economic lens. For each cohort, a year of lost college readiness has a \$3.56 billion fiscal impact and a \$9.46

billion social impact, while a one-year reduction in attainment has a \$2.33 billion fiscal impact and a \$6.19 billion social impact.

These gains also vary by economic sector, with the report specifically looking at advanced manufacturing, cyber technology, healthcare and financial services, which all have higher employment growth than across all fields statewide. Of these, healthcare had the largest gains per graduate in both social (\$686,000) and fiscal (\$245,240 impacts).

One of Education Forward’s goals, established in 2015, is to reach a 60% postsecondary attainment rate across the state by 2030. Its Education Progress Meter shows attainment increasing almost 2% between 2019 and 2021, to 47.9% in 2021. Rich Nickel, the organization’s president and CEO, said every percentage point is equivalent to about 55,000 new degrees statewide.

“The byproduct of pursuing that goal is already showing itself in massive ways, even though the percentage point gains may be small,” he said. “...The progress is being made now and it’s certainly worth the investment people are putting into it.”

One approach to raising Arizona’s attainment rate, according to the report, was to work towards achieving racial parity in college completion rates. It found that achieving parity in four degree completion would result in an additional \$8.69 billion in social gains per cohort, as well as an additional \$3.29 billion in fiscal gains. Achieving parity in college enrollment would add \$574 million in social gains and \$209 million in fiscal impacts.

Other current initiatives mentioned as moving toward higher attainment in Arizona included the Arizona Promise Program and increased investment in dual enrollment across the state.

The full report can be found at helios.org/billions-to-gain.