

October 8, 2024

To: Mayor Haviland-Lie & City Council Members
Planning Commission Chair Norton & Commissioners

I am writing on behalf of the City of Kotzebue Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) to emphasize the urgent need for a strategic investment in revitalizing our existing City Recreation Center ("Family Entertainment Center") instead of diverting funds and resources into developing the Grain/Cain Capital Building for Parks & Recreation use.

At both our April 2024 and September 2024 PRAC meetings, the committee discussed the potential use of the Grain/Cain Building. While the building offers some space (~2,000 ft²), it is currently an empty shell with no interior structure. After allocating space for fitness equipment and essential bath/changing rooms, there would be minimal room left for much-needed community programs such as exercise classes. Additionally, this facility lacks the size to accommodate racquetball, pickleball, or basketball courts—essential features for a comprehensive recreation space.

In contrast, the City Recreation Center (FEC) already possesses critical infrastructure, including a half court, racquetball courts, weight rooms, exercise classrooms, shower rooms, changing areas, and saunas. While we acknowledge that the Recreation Center requires significant repairs, the cost—estimated at over \$2 million—is far more reasonable than the \$15-20 million needed for a new facility. This figure does not even include the costs associated with demolition and site cleanup of the existing structure.

Moreover, the FEC's steel frame and concrete foundation are estimated to be worth at least \$2 million, offering a strong and valuable base for future renovations. Demolishing this solid structure would not only be an inefficient use of resources but would also exacerbate our already strained landfill capacity, imposing an additional environmental cost on the community.

Given our community's recent hardships—losing access to the Recreation Center, the isolation of COVID-19, and the growing financial burdens on residents—now more than ever, we need accessible, year-round recreational facilities. Investing in the Recreation Center would directly support our mission to improve residents' physical health, emotional well-being, and social connections.

In May 2024, we shared these concerns with the Mayor and City Manager (email attached), and we reiterate our recommendation today: the City of Kotzebue should prioritize revitalizing the Recreation Center to serve as a true hub for the community rather than pursuing the Grain/Cain Building, which would not meet the community's needs even with significant investment.

We respectfully urge the City Council and Planning Commission to consider the long-term benefits of reinvesting in the Recreation Center—both from a financial and community health perspective—and reject any further plans to develop the Grain/Cain Building for Parks & Recreation use.

Thank you for your consideration of this crucial matter. We look forward to your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a large loop and extending horizontally across the page.

Matthew I. Bergan, P.E.
Chair, City Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee