Future unclear for UA research center in Nogales

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This University of Arizona building – located at the northeast corner of Mastick Way and White Park Drive in Nogales – has sat empty since 2016 and its future remains unclear.

Photo by Arielle Zions

A building in Nogales that was intended to house a University of Arizona project to address health disparities along the U.S.-Mexico border remains empty nearly two years after the UA took it over, and its future remains uncertain.

"I can't tell you when it's going to open, I can't tell you what the exact plans are," said David Marrero, director for the UA's Center for Health Disparities Research (CHDR), the organization that was originally intended to occupy the building at the northeast corner of Mastick Way and White Park Drive.

The local office of the Center for Elimination of Border Health Disparities (now called the CHDR) would "certainly" open in 2016, UA public health professor Elizabeth Calhoun told the NI in April
2016. However, while UA signs were posted in front of the building and on its door, nobody ever moved in.

Contacted last week, Marrero said he doesn't know the plans for the building because they were proposed before he arrived at the UA. Calhoun did not return a request for comment.

“The last thing I saw, which was last year, was (architectural) plans for the actual building,” Marrero said.

Marrero said he’s never been inside the office and has no projects planned for Nogales.

According to a UA capital improvement plan, the university’s College of Public Health is paying $90,675 a year in rent to the Mastick Family Trust for the building. A building permit with the City of Nogales filed in late 2016 also shows that the UA hired a Tucson contractor to do a $212,000 renovation to the property, though it wasn't clear if the work had been completed.

The Nogales office was likely going to focus on diseases that disproportionately affect border residents, like diabetes, Calhoun said in 2016. She also said the center intended to do public outreach in Nogales.

“I fully endorse” such a plan for Nogales, Marrero said. “I'm all about having that opportunity and if I knew that the building was going to be open next week or something like that, I would probably start making plans for its utilization.

“But I can’t tell you what those plans are because I wasn’t the person who generated them,” he added.