

LOCAL

PHS Gala Concert pics

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SPORTS

Museum wreath auction

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Pinedale Roundup

Newspaper of the Upper Green River Valley, Est. 1904

DECEMBER 9, 2022

One Dollar

Ricketts' amended 'guest ranch' request raises concerns

By **Billy Arnold**
Jackson Hole News&Guide

Editor's note: We chose to run this article about Sublette County commissioners' Dec. 6 meeting to show an outside perspective of a controversial issue. It is lightly edited for length. The Roundup and Examiner will explore this and other county planning and zoning items in detail as well.

JACKSON – In the windy, unincorporated hunting and ranching enclave of Bondurant, south of Jackson Hole, Richard Pearson is thought to be one of the oldest residents who grew up there.

Pearson doesn't like what he's seeing in the town he's called home all of his 70-plus years. Some 8 miles away from the rustic Elkhorn Bar and Trading Post, the community watering hole, billionaire Joe Ricketts is trying to develop a resort and guest ranch on the banks of the Hoback River.

"These billionaires have some kind of status thing going on where they have to go and buy a big ranch and convert it into exclusive lodges or guest ranches," Pearson said. "This guy doesn't need the money. It's just a hobby for him. It's a status thing. Why should we have to let ourselves be subject to his whims?"

In December 2021, Sublette County commissioners approved a rezone allowing Ricketts to build an exclusive resort on 56 acres of his Jackson Fork Ranch's 1,300 or so acres.

Bondurant residents tied that approval up in a Casper courtroom, where oral arguments were heard Nov. 10. The judge's decision is pending.

Then, on Tuesday, the Sublette County Board of County Commissioners considered the latest play from the TD Ameritrade founder, whose family owns the Chicago Cubs. He wants commissioners to give him the go-ahead to run a guest ranch across 1,300 acres of his Jackson Fork Ranch – as opposed to the 478 acres where it's permitted now – while incorporating the 160-or-so-acre Dead Shot Ranch. Ricketts has raised white bison on the 1,300-acre ranch. If he incorporates the Dead Shot, Ricketts would add an 8,000-square-foot eight-bedroom "cabin," a 6,000-square-foot "dining pavilion" and a new youth bunkhouse to the smaller guest ranch operation. Up to 50 guests could stay on the Dead Shot at a time.

But Ricketts' team withdrew his application for the guest ranch Tuesday, Dec. 6, after finger pointing and hand wringing – though they regretted that withdrawal after learning of a

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Sweet dreams

As young Clara sleeps on Christmas night after Herr Drosselmeyer's gift of 'The Nutcracker,' sweet visions fill her dreams. Many of the 'visions' of Sugarbabes, Marshmallow Sheep, Gingersnaps, Candycanes, Spearmint Garland, Gummy Bears and Ladies in Waiting are from the local cast. Dancers with spearmint boughs are Nina Gordei, Naomi Gaffney, Juniper Dale, Sari Cenac, Kali Rich, Daelyn Smith, Gabriella Green and Koral Pierce. The sweet little Sugarbabes are Oakley Morss, Katherine Morris, Kamryn Booth, Tenley Telfer, Elizabeth Scout Holmes, Burgundy Zoller and Addison Coble. Local performers worked with the traveling San Diego Ballet to present 'The Nutcracker' Dec. 1-2 in the Sheppard Auditorium.



Joan Mitchell photos

Optimism, frustration as pieces fall into place for the Hospital District

By **Robert Galbreath**
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PINEDALE – Patience remains the watchword for the Sublette County Hospital District (SCHD) as it waits for pieces to fall in place on several fronts – the merger with the Sublette Center, the construction bidding process and a decision on grant money from the Wyoming State Loan and Investment Board (SLIB).

Merger difficulties

Negotiations on the merger between the Sublette Center and SCHD continue. The meat of the matter hinges on both entities signing

a membership substitution agreement that will trigger the merger.

Under the membership substitution agreement, SCHD trustees will replace the Sublette Center board of directors one at a time, allowing the Sublette Center to retain a degree of control in the leadup to a full transfer of assets.

During the Nov. 30 SCHD meeting, members of the board voiced exasperation with the process. Trustee Dave Bell said he was "really frustrated" by the pace of the merger. Drawing out the process was costing taxpayers "millions," Bell stated.

Hoffman responded that the time lost due

to a "slowdown" in negotiations was "quite significant."

Bell proposed scheduling a signing ceremony between the two entities on Dec. 9 to make a "push" for the merger.

Attorneys initially proposed Dec. 9 as a potential target date to wrap up negotiations, explained SCHD attorney Abigail Forwood. The date was not intended to serve as a firm deadline, she added.

The "elephant in the room," according to Forwood, was the SCHD's "obligation" to build a long-term care facility in order to receive grant money or access funds from its \$32-million loan through the U.S. Department

of Agriculture (USDA).

In February 2020, the Sublette County Commissioners pledged \$20 million to construct a long-term care facility adjacent to the critical access hospital. One of the conditions in the motion was the merger between the Sublette Center and hospital district.

If the Sublette Center continued to "push the ball further down the line," SCHD attorneys would "re-discuss" the hospital district's commitments and options in regards to the USDA loan and the SCHD's deed of transfer agreement with the county, Forwood said.

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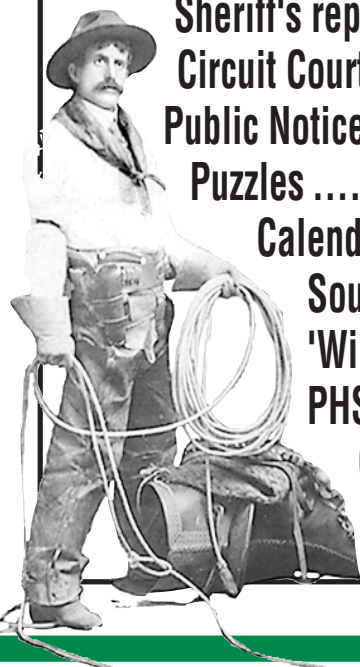


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THE ROUNDUP, ROUNDED UP

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ROBERT GALBREATH PHOTO

Sublette County Clerk Carrie Long, far left, swears in newly elected Sublette County Hospital District Trustee Ashli Tatro on Wednesday, Nov. 30. Also pictured are SCHD trustee Kenda Tanner, center left, and SCHD board chairwoman Tonia Hoffman, center right. Hoffman and Dave Doorn, SCHD administrator, welcomed Tatro to the board. Tatro said she was 'excited to be here – hopefully I can do some good.'

HOSPITAL

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"I hope we won't get to that point," she said.

Merger progress

The Sublette Center Board of Directors held a special meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 6, to discuss the revised membership substitution agreement and review recommendations from its attorney, board chairwoman Patty Racich told the Roundup on Wednesday.

"We had a good discussion yesterday," she said. "Our attorney is communicating with the (SCHD) attorney."

Hoffman remained optimistic that the agreement will be signed soon.

"The actions that were taken last week and the comments that were made (at the Nov. 30 meeting) gave the Sublette Center the sense of urgency we've felt for months," she added.

Hoffman said she was "confident" significant work toward a signed agreement will be completed by the end of December. Attorneys on both sides were working hard behind the scenes to "push things forward," she added.

"We will get there," she said.

Delays in bidding process

The SCHD hoped to have a guaranteed maximum price for the critical access hospital and long-term care facility project by late October or November from Layton Construction, the district's construction manager and general contractor.

A guaranteed maximum price contract places a cap on the amount of money the owner will pay its contractor, according to the American Institute of Architects (AIA). This type of contract "keeps projects from endless costs," the AIA website stated.

The procurement of bids from subcontractors for certain aspects of the project – notably mechanical systems, plumbing and HVAC – remained a "struggle," reported trustee Jamison Ziegler, a member of the building committee.

Layton and Karl Leuschow, the SCHD's owner's representative, were both working "diligently" to keep bids from subcontractors "within a reasonable budget," Ziegler said.

Layton and Lueschow continued to think outside the box during negotiations with subcontractors, Dave Doorn, SCHD administrator, told the board. He felt confident the SCHD's team would "find an answer."

Once discussions between Layton and subcontractors are completed and bids are in place for each component of the project, Layton can determine a guaranteed maximum price for the project.

SLIB – not yet

The SCHD submitted a \$10-million

grant application for federal health-care infrastructure funds available through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and distributed by the Wyoming SLIB Board.

In November, members of the SLIB Board requested the SCHD "return to the drawing board" and rewrite the grant application to better align the district's request with COVID-19 relief, said Kari DeWitt, the district's public relations director and grant writer.

DeWitt told trustees she felt the revised grant application was in "good shape." The SLIB Board will rehear the SCHD's request on Dec. 15, DeWitt added.

Health Foundation – go it alone

The Green River Valley Health Foundation declined an offer from SCHD trustees to merge with the Sublette County Health Foundation, Hoffman announced on Nov. 30.

SCHD trustees established the Sublette County Health Foundation in May to raise money and resources for the hospital and improve health care across Sublette County.

Hoffman said the SCHD intended to "move full speed ahead" with the Sublette County Health Foundation on its own.

Trustees passed a unanimous motion to adopt bylaws for the Sublette County Health Foundation on Nov. 30.

The Sublette County Health Foundation was in the process of applying for tax-exempt status with the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Hoffman said. The foundation is still in the preliminary planning phase, she added.

In other hospital district news

- DeWitt reported that the SCHD had applied for \$12,865,600 in grants from federal, state and local sources since July. The largest grant application was the \$10 million in ARPA health-care infrastructure funds distributed by the Wyoming SLIB Board.

The district has received \$279,000 in grant money since July, DeWitt said. The total includes ARPA funds to purchase a new Zoll monitor for EMS. The piece of equipment is used to monitor a patient's cardiac rhythm in an ambulance.

The SCHD also received a grant from the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services to fund further education for nurses and medical technicians, DeWitt said.

- The SCHD's cash position was "solid" following the receipt of \$584,000 in tax revenue during November, Bell reported. Based on the latest budget released by the SCHD business office, Bell projected the district will "beat our objective" on expenses by \$1 million. He thanked SCHD staff for running a "lean" operation and keeping spending within "thin margins."

- Trustees passed a unanimous motion to continue scheduling board meetings on the fourth Wednesday of the month through 2023.



Weekly Weather Forecast

Pinedale, Wyoming • Dec. 9 - Dec. 14

Today

Sunrise: 7:38 a.m. **Sunset:** 4:45 p.m.

High: **18°** Low: **2°**

RealFeel® 14° 4°

Day: Mainly cloudy and cold.

Night: Mainly cloudy.



Saturday

High: **23°**

Low: **20°**

Cloudy with a bit of snow.



Sunday

High: **29°**

Low: **4°**

Cloudy with a bit of snow.



Monday

High: **20°**

Low: **3°**

Cloudy, snow, 1-3"; colder.



Tuesday

High: **14°**

Low: **4°**

Mostly sunny, a flurry; cold.



Wednesday

High: **16°**

Low: **3°**

Cold with snow showers.

