

LOCAL

Pinedale students stand out at Regional Science Fair

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LOCAL

Locals land on UW Honor Roll

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Pinedale Roundup

Newspaper of the Upper Green River Valley, Est. 1904

FEBRUARY 10, 2023

One Dollar

Leyva's bond amended to \$100,000 surety

By Joy Ufford
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SUBLETTE COUNTY – After more than five months in jail unable to meet a cash-only bond, a Daniel man accused of felony assault and attempted second-degree murder on Aug. 31, 2022, had his bond modified during a Feb. 2 hearing in 9th District Court.

Nicholas A. Leyva was also charged with domestic battery and destruction of a cell phone belonging to his husband Dr. Buck Wallace. After the alleged assault that Wallace said began while the two were eating pizza and

talking about their divorce, the injured Wallace drove to a neighbor's home and requested an Air Idaho life-flight to Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center, where he was treated and released several days later, according to court records.

Leyva pleaded not guilty to all charges and his case was bound over to 9th District Court, where now-retired Judge Marv Tyler set a \$100,000 cash-only bond.

There, Leyva amended his pleas to not guilty by reason of mental illness. After the

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Commissioners to Hospital District - wait two weeks

By Robert Galbreath
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PINEDALE – People crowded into the small meeting room at the Sublette County Courthouse and filled up adjacent hallways on Feb. 7 to hear the Board of Sublette County Commissioners' response to the Sublette County Hospital District's (SCHD) request to fund a \$9.2-million shortfall in construction costs to build a critical access hospital and long-term care facility.

Following one-and-a-half hours of discussion, including a presentation given by the SCHD and its management and construction partners, commission chairman Sam White asked whether board members wanted to take action on the SCHD's appeal.

The commissioners declined.

The county asked the hospital district to return in two weeks, allowing the commissioners more time to consider the request. White encouraged the SCHD to explore fundraising options in the interim.

SCHD Board Chairwoman Tonia Hoffman and SCHD administrator Dave Doorn thanked the county for its time and willingness to revisit the issue on Feb. 21.

Presenting the case

The SCHD Board of Trustees passed a unanimous motion to present their case to

the county on Jan. 25, after depleting most options to bridge a \$9.2-million deficit before the spring building season begins.

Based on bids received by Layton Construction for the entire project, the SCHD's general contractor and construction manager, the estimated price tag for the health-care campus currently stands at \$75.2 million.

The SCHD and its predecessor, the Sublette County Rural Health Care District, raised \$66 million, or nearly 88 percent of the total project cost, through loans, grants and pledges over the past several years.

County commissioners passed a unanimous motion in February 2020, pledging \$20 million to construct a new long-term care facility pending voter approval of a ballot initiative to create a hospital district and the successful merger between the SCHD and Sublette Center.

The motion followed months of long, difficult negotiations among the county, the Sublette County Rural Health Care District and the Sublette Center Board of Directors.

Sublette County voters approved the formation of the SCHD, granting it the ability to levy property tax to build a hospital and long-term care facility, by a 60-percent margin on Nov. 6, 2020.

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JFR team persuades county to alter guest ranch rule for Ricketts' resort

By Joy Ufford
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SUBLETTE COUNTY – Sublette County commissioners voted, 4-1, at their meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 7, to open up the current "guest ranch" definition to allow five-star resort guests to participate in guest-ranch recreation at the Jackson Fork Ranch.

Billionaire Joe Ricketts' team included agent Morgan Fischer, who is determined to open Ricketts' Hoback Basin property for a resort and 1,300-acre guest ranch and allow guests to move between the two, creating a

tourism destination between Pinedale and Jackson.

Jackson Fork Ranch and the planned resort are located on Upper Hoback Road near Bondurant and many citizens have opposed its development at Sublette County Planning & Zoning Commission public hearings and at regular county commissioner meetings.

However, a majority of the five have approved Ricketts' past applications, overriding the P&Z Commission's recommendations.

As a result, Fischer went straight to commissioners this time, possibly preempting



CALL O'HARE PHOTO

A group of Pinedale High School students work on their snow sculpture Wednesday evening ahead of Pinedale Winter Carnival's snow sculpture contest, planned for this weekend, Feb. 10-12. The Town of Pinedale's Public Works Department helped pack the snow last week. Voting for the best snow sculpture along Pine Street takes place on Saturday and the winner will receive a \$500 cash prize. Other planned events this weekend include skijoring at the Pinedale Rodeo Grounds, the Cardboard Classic at the Burzlander Sledding Hill, a snowmobile show and the Snocross Race 120cc and 200cc. For a complete schedule of Winter Carnival events, visit www.mainstreetpinedale.com.

AQD issues Ozone Outlook for Upper Green River Basin

SUBLETTE COUNTY — The Air Quality Division (AQD) of Wyoming's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has issued an Upper Green River Basin (URGB) Ozone Outlook starting on Friday, Feb. 10 and forecasted to persist through Sunday, Feb. 12. The AQD plans to continue forecasting daily to determine if an Ozone Action Day should be issued to implement Ozone Contingency Plans.

The AQD issues ozone outlooks when meteorological conditions conducive to

ozone formation are forecasted to persist for multiple days in the UGRB Ozone Nonattainment Area.

Wintertime ozone forms in the basin when there is a presence of ozone precursor emissions including oxides of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds coupled with meteorological conditions, such as strong temperature inversions, low winds, snow cover and sunlight.

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the usefulness of a public hearing on its as-yet unheard amended guest ranch conditional use application (CUP) before P&Z officials.

Teamwork

Tuesday, Fischer, attorney Ed Wood and attorney John Graham appealed Sublette County Planner Dennis Fornstrom's interpretation of a guest ranch's outdoor recreation as offered "for guests only" as the current zoning regulation states.

Although they denied trying to "make an end run," that was the outcome, convincing four commissioners – Tom Noble, chair Sam White, Mack Bradley and Dave Stephens –

to ignore Fornstrom's straight-from-the-book "interpretation" of "for guests only."

They appeared to brag, cajole or debate commissioners about the need for them to override Fornstrom's interpretation and allow "underlying by-right recreational activities" between the entire Jackson Fork Ranch and resort.

Although Jackson Fork Ranch's CUP now covers 400-plus acres, Fischer will appear at the Planning & Zoning Commission's Feb. 16 meeting and the Board of Sublette Commissioners' Feb. 21 meeting with the


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Official newspaper of Sublette County and the town of Pinedale.

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Landowners ask to dismiss their Sanctuary Lodge suit

By Joy Ufford
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SUBLETTE COUNTY – Landowners and families challenging the county’s majority approval of developer Jason Moyes’ plans to build a high-end women’s treatment center at the Hoback Rim have asked the judge to dismiss their civil suit.

In the initial filing in 9th District Court, eight parties were listed against Jason and Melinda Moyes and the Sublette County Board of Commissioners.

This was the second civil suit challenging county commissioners’ protested majority 3-2 vote to accept the treatment center as a “public facility,” despite the county’s planning and zoning commission’s recommendation that the project was not suitable for the conditional use permit.

County planner Dennis Fornstrom and Sublette County Attorney Clayton Melinkovich had advised the planning commission that the county commissioners’ vote on the Sanctuary Lodge conditional use permit would set the precedent.

Commissioners Sam White, Tom Noble and now-retired Joel Bousman voted to approve Sanctuary Lodge as a “public facility” while commissioners Dave Stephens and Doug Vickrey voted nay.

A Jan. 27 court document corrected spelling of misspelled names and stated that Sublette Conservation Associates was mistakenly added as a plaintiff, court records show. The document also said adjacent landowners Mike and Tara Miller asked to be dropped from the suit.

The same day, a motion was filed asking for “voluntary dismissal” of the civil suit

Now-retired District Court Judge Marv Tyler had assigned the case to the Teton County courtroom; from there it settled at the desk of 3rd District Court Judge Richard Lavery in Sweetwater County.

After Melinkovich filed the administrative record and requested a briefing schedule and hearing, Judge Lavery outlined both parties’ deadlines to file legal briefs and set a one-hour hearing for May 30.

As of Feb. 3, he had not signed the motion to dismiss the civil suit.

LEYVA

Continued from 1A

alleged assault, Wallace had told Detective Travis Lanning that Leyva sometimes took Seroquel, a powerful antipsychotic prescribed to Wallace.

Judge Tyler suspended the case while Leyva awaits a mental evaluation.

Newly appointed Judge Kate McKay listened to Leyva’s attorney Alex Freeburg, Sublette County Attorney Clayton Melinkovich and licensed social worker Sarah Hixson before making her decision.

March 13 trial

At Leyva’s bond modification hearing, a half-dozen people including DeNava sat behind her son and Freeburg.

Wallace also attended, sitting across from family and watching Leyva closely. Leyva did not look at Wallace.

The judge said she reviewed the criminal information and was awaiting results of the evaluation, noting Leyva’s trial is still set for March 13.

Hixson wrote and also testified that she met Leyva shortly after his arrest because jail staff were concerned about “suicide ideations.” Since then, Hixson said, Leyva has shown “no strong upsets and no suggestion of violence” if he was released from custody. His past shows no history of violence, she said.

Melinkovich questioned Hixson, who said she believed Leyva was at first very upset about what he was told he’d done, then decided to deal with his criminal case to put his life

back together.

Leyva, who has lived in Sublette County for seven years, is no risk to the community and is offered a job with a place to stay, Freeburg said.

Melinkovich said, “a couple of individual persons are at risk,” apparently Wallace and a friend named on DeNava’s protective order.

Leyva is also at risk, he added, because of his stressful marital status.

“There is no issue except when there is an issue,” he said.

Wallace initiated divorce proceedings against Leyva after his arrest with his attorney seeking to keep Leyva from using any of his or their assets to defend himself, according to court records.

No history

Judge McKay said she considered that “two experienced and respected judges” set high bails, adding she only had that day’s hearing to draw from. The nature and circumstances of the alleged violent offenses raised the stakes for Leyva, she said.

She noted Leyva’s “calm” behavior in court and counseling in his favor.

“One significant factor – Mr. Leyva does not appear to have any criminal history and no indication that he’s ever failed to appear in court.”

She ruled to modify the \$100,000 cash-only bond to surety, meaning 10 percent of the amount. If released, he could be under house arrest or wear a SCRAM unit and work “with substantial details of his employment,” she said.

Freeburg requested a pre-sentence investigation, which the judge ordered, to be disclosed only to the defense.

Leyva was still in custody at press time.

Correction

In the article titled, “Lawsuit against Moyes’ Sanctuary Lodge is underway,” it was incorrectly reported that Jackson Fork Ranch agent Morgan Fischer said that wildlife migrations and habitat are not a concern. Fischer did not specifically say the wildlife issues of migration and habitats were not relevant to development plans.

Weekly Weather Forecast

Pinedale, Wyoming • Feb. 10 - Feb. 16

Today

Sunrise: 7:24 a.m. **Sunset:** 5:44 p.m.

High: **27°** Low: **1°**

RealFeel® 30° -4°

Day: Mostly sunny.
Night: Patchy clouds.



Saturday

High: **28°**

Clearing.

Low: **6°**



Sunday

High: **34°**

Partly cloudy.

Low: **2°**



Monday

High: **33°**

Times of clouds and sun.

Low: **9°**



Tuesday

High: **25°**

Cloudy, a bit of snow; colder.

Low: **1°**



Wednesday

High: **20°**

Mostly cloudy, a bit of snow.

Low: **5°**



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RICKETTS

Continued from 1A

amended CUP application.

For the entire Jackson Fork Ranch to be viable as a guest ranch CUP, Fornstrom's position was that the property "would be locked into that use" with outdoor guest-ranch recreational activities "for guests only."

Not for the public, not for resort customers.

And the guest ranch CUP calls for it consisting of land with an agricultural use, Fornstrom said.

"As soon as you ask for a CUP to establish a guest ranch and ... design your land for activities, you've locked it into that use," he said. Resort guests aren't intended to use the guest ranch recreational services.

Stickler

"That is the stickler," Wood said, arguing that third-party recreational use is an Agriculture-zoned property's "underlying right."

Fornstrom's interpretation is "unduly narrow," meaning separate recreation activities for Ricketts' guest ranch and resort guests.

But the commissioners – "the elected officials" – could change that if they wanted, Wood said, and even pass a resolution to that effect. The team said that if commissioners set Fornstrom aside, they would cap total guest ranch clients at 40 adults and 10 children and resort guests at 150 as they proceed with construction.

"Our position is the language (of for guests only) is not intended to cut out your underlying property rights even with other encumbrances on the property," said Graham. "... If you're saying a CUP cuts off the underlying uses, you're really impacting how these parcels are used."

Sublette County Attorney Clayton Melinkovich reminded commissioners they are the county's legislative body

"You have the ability to define regulations as you see fit as long as your interpretation is not clearly erroneous," he said. "You determine what that means."

He advised, "I would stay focused on the definition that is at play, 'for guests only.' You can interpret what that means. ... There is not a specific definition for 'guest.' It's up to the board to determine what that means."

Five stars

Fischer said 500 people could come to horseback ride, cross-country ski or fish. "We're saying, we could do that."

But he would "limit the total number of guests at any given time under the CUP," he said. "A five-star (resort) is not going to work if 500 people are hanging around the ranch."

"(Ricketts) has made a sizable investment that dwarfs your hospital project," Fischer said. "We can't keep coming back to these narrow interpretations. We can't build a business on this."

He could withdraw the pending guest ranch CUP application to be heard Feb. 16 and come back with "little boxes" drawn for different guests.

"To me this is the easiest and quickest way."

The Dead Shot Ranch can be built up fairly quickly, open "and prove to this county ... that we are stewards of the property and county."

"We're not here to challenge Dennis," Fischer said. "We're asking for a different interpretation based on our set of circumstances, which is quite unique. ... We're asking for a definition that fits this and layers with the (guest ranch) CUP."

White asked Fornstrom if under current rules, a guest ranch's outdoor recreation is for its guests only. Fornstrom said a guest ranch's activities are not open to the general public and have not been intended to serve an adjacent resort.

Fischer and Wood emphasized they only want to open up outdoor recreation on the guest ranch.

Up the road, Fischer said, commissioners can see "all the good we've done, bringing in tens of thousands of dollars in lodging taxes" and helping the county school districts.

Young scientists triumph at regional fair

ROCK SPRINGS – Twenty-one bright young minds from Pinedale Middle School competed at the Southwest Regional Junior and Senior Division Science Fair on Feb. 2 at Western Wyoming Community College in Rock Springs and returned home with a bag full of hardware.

Six student projects captured golds, three earned silvers and two snagged bronzes at the event.

Results

Ash Cooper achieved first place in the engineering and mechanics category and won first place overall for the Regional Science Fair.

First-place was awarded to the following students in a variety of categories:

Alessandra Goodsell in behavioral and social sciences

Juniper Dale in animal sciences

Samantha Prior in computer science

Macie Antonino and Oakley Francis in biomedical and health sciences

Taggart Harber and Paxton Loveday in microbiology

The following students received second place:

Israel Bandin and Gavin Bohnet in plant sciences

Shealyn Bennett and Remedios Mata in biomedical and health science

Teagan Fildey and Naomi Gaffney in behavioral and social sciences

The following students earned third place:

Oz Koci and Casi Ruch in animal science

Aylen Mills in animal science



JOAN MITCHELL PHOTO

Pinedale Middle School students put in a strong showing at the Regional Science Fair in Rock Springs on Feb. 2. Pictured in front, from left, are Oakley Francis, Naomi Gaffney, Teagan Fildey, Remedios Mata and Ryan Allsop. Second row, from left, are Aylen Mills, Juniper Dale, Shealyn Bennett and Macie Antonino. Third row, from left, are Israel Bandin, Ash Cooper, Casi Ruch, Alessandra Goodsell and Oz Koci. Back row, from left, are science teacher Clare Rutar, Gavin Bohnet, Paxton Loveday, Taggart Harber, Luke Nagel and science teacher Devin Howard.

Melinkovich said he could not "weigh in on a policy statement" but "either side of this is legally defensible."

Comments

Noble asked for public comment.

Kelly Telfer of Pinedale said she worked on an Oregon guest ranch, where small groups came to experience the outdoors.

Dan Bailey of Bondurant also lives on the Upper Hoback Road and said Ricketts' goals reduce the prominence of agricultural use and multiply recreational uses and impacts.

"You seem to be awfully focused on Jackson Fork Ranch, Bailey said, instead if a narrower interpretation of the county's planning and zoning regulations. "We're out of the scope of what this meeting should be about."

As for Ricketts' plans "dwarfing the hospital project, I don't think we have the whole picture here of what to expect from Mr. Fischer and Mr. Ricketts."

Bondurant homeowner Lisi Krall told commissioners Ricketts' proposals will profoundly change life on the Upper Hoback Road.

Vickrey commented, "In all the time in the past four years with the exception of one time, I've supported our boards, no matter their opinion. I'm going to support Dennis's definition of what is here."

Bradley said he heard Vickrey "loud and clear" but people need to see agricultural living, walk on the grass.

Stephens was offended by Fischer's bringing up money while trying to make these changes affects people living here.

Fischer apologized, adding, "This has never been about money. This is about the feasibility of a large-scale investment. ... We're asking to build this resort and this guest ranch on a solid foundation."

Motion, anyone

White asked commissioners for a motion, Noble said he wanted to control the number of guests on the property but not go against Fornstrom's opinion.

"Our intention is not to question Dennis's judgement," Fischer said. "We're not asking you to make a motion to overturn Dennis' interpretations."

No one spoke for a minute.

"Your silence will stand as affirmation (of Fornstrom's interpretation)," Wood said. "If you don't make a motion, Dennis's interpretation stands. If you choose not to act, his interpretation will stand."

Melinkovich said commissioners could "punt today" on this, adopt their request or make conditions that the P&Z Commission would submit back to them for a final vote.

Their decision could change Fornstrom's interpretation – but not the actual regulation, he said. "The effect is the same but you're not actually striking a line in the regulations."

Designing the requested motion took commissioners and Ricketts' team through a half-dozen drafts before they all agreed. Noble was "down this rabbit hole," while Bradley felt lightening restrictions would have little with no economic downfall to others.

"It took four or five of us together to put this motion together; that should days one thing – is this a real valid motion," Vickrey said. "I'm not going against him."

The vote was 4-1, with Vickrey's dissent. Wood asked if the board would make a resolution; White said the vote was contained in the meeting minutes.

OZONE

Continued from 1A

During an UGRB Ozone Outlook, the AQD asks folks to consider reducing ozone precursor emissions by minimizing idling of vehicles and engines, avoiding overfilling gas tanks, tightening fuels caps, deferring truck and equipment fueling to the evening hours and postponing construction activities and open burning.

When UGRB Ozone Outlooks are issued, the public is asked to postpone nonessential activities or complete essential activities prior to the days included in the UGRB Ozone Outlook to reduce precursor emissions and ground-level ozone formation.

Street Talk

By Terry Allen

The state is asking the feds to consider delisting the grizzly bear. How do you feel about that?



As long as the hunting doesn't get out of control, it's ok.

Kally Davis, Pinedale



I think that's smart because of how many grizzlies there are.

Ryne Harder, Pinedale



I hate grizzlies. If we delist them, can we shoot them? Let's shoot 'em.

Marilynn Sheldon, Pinedale



I've had two friends mauled by grizzlies. One was in the hospital for three weeks because the bear spray didn't stop it.

Dennis Sheldon, Pinedale



Yes, grizzlies are overpopulated. They suffer from a lack of food and infertility. People that love bears don't know the population and disease status.

Carol Gaidis, Pinedale

COMMISSION

Continued from A1

In February 2020, financial analysts at Cumming placed the estimated total cost to build a hospital and long-term care facility at \$54 million. Cumming is an international company specializing in project cost consultation.

Inflation and escalation

In March 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 appeared in Wyoming. The pandemic severely disrupted the global economy, international supply chains and the labor market.

By September 2022, the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics recorded the sharpest hike in consumer prices since the “Great Inflation” of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

On June 28, 2022, in the midst of spiraling inflation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) approved a \$32-million loan for the SCHD to build a hospital.

The successful loan application was the culmination of an effort begun by the Sublette County Rural Health Care District in August 2019, involving countless hours of time by SCHD board members and employees to complete the required paperwork.

Layton Construction, the SCHD’s construction manager and general contractor, put the entire project out to bid in July 2022.

Layton canvassed 1,287 companies during the bidding process, said Jeremy Hobbs, company vice president. Layton received bids from approximately 130 subcontractors in August, he added, totaling \$80.2 million, leaving the SCHD with a shortfall of around \$24 million.

Layton has not accepted any bids at this time.

The sharp rise in construction costs was primarily due to inflation in prices for commodities and “economic escalation,” Hobbs told the commissioners on Feb. 7.

Escalation in economics is defined as a “persistent rise in the price of specific commodities, goods or services due to a combination of inflation, supply and demand,” according to Penn State University.

Steel prices, for example, increased 56.3 percent from early 2021 to the end of 2022, Hobbs said.

A “robust market” in commercial construction also drove prices up, Hobbs explained. Subcontractors in certain fields, particularly mechanical and electrical systems, are stretched thin with other jobs, he added. As a result, the cost to pay and house specialized tradesmen with the time and willingness to temporarily relocate to Sublette County is especially high, Hobbs said. Layton reached out to 42 electrical subcontractors and received bids from only two firms, Hobbs continued.

The SCHD and its team, including Layton, Lueschow Project Management and Star Valley Health, the district’s management partner, launched an aggressive round of value added engineering in August, involving hundreds of employee hours, said Hobbs.

The team shaved \$5.4 million off the project cost, said Lueschow, comprising roughly 7 percent of the total price tag. Value-added engineering typically cuts between 2 and 3 percent, he added.

Layton and Lueschow spent weeks traveling the country to meet with each subcontractor to review their bids.

“We’ve gone through an exhaustive effort to validate every number” in each bid, said Lueschow.

In December, due to a herculean effort by SCHD staff, its partners and local and state elected officials, the Wyoming State Loan and Investment Board awarded the SCHD a \$10-million grant in federal American Recovery Plan Act dollars for health-care infrastructure.

The SCHD also plans to front \$2 million of its own cash toward the project.

Time and money crunch

The decision to approach the county was difficult, said Hoffman.

“This has caused us a significant amount of turmoil over the last several months,” she told commissioners. “Our board has diligently tried to find every possible avenue that we could come up with to bridge this gap and to fund this deficit.”

The SCHD’s “long-range goal” is to “become less dependent, if not independent,” from tax revenue, noted Hoffman.

“We want to be able to operate a hospital facility that will be self-sufficient and that will operate on its revenues,” she added. “We feel very strongly that we will get there. That will be a win for everybody in this room ... to have increased services and provide better health care for our communities. We need your help to get from Point A to Point B.”

The district is under intense pressure to begin construction this spring. In order to close on the \$32-million USDA loan, the SCHD must demonstrate that all funding is in place, explained Lueschow.

Layton also hopes to lock in their gross maximum price (GMP) for the project in the immediate future. Once the GMP is established, subcontractors are contractually required to stay within the parameters of their bid. Simply put, the total project cost will not increase above \$75.2 million if funding is lined out and the GMP established, Lueschow told commissioners.

Delaying construction comes with significant risks, warned Lueschow and Hobbs. Waiting several months means losing subcontractors and pushing the project out to 2024 would force the district to restart the entire bidding process, Lueschow explained.

“I can’t guarantee what interest we’ll get (from subcontractors) in round two,” Hobbs said. “One thing we do know, costs never go down.”

Narrow options

Without funds from the county, the SCHD is left with the prospect of borrowing more money or seeking private donors to cover the \$9.2-million deficit over the course of a few months.

Doorn said additional loans from the USDA to cover inflation remained an “unknown.”

State statute prohibits the SCHD from taking out private loans or raising property taxes without a public vote, explained Mike Hunsaker, chief operating officer for the SCHD and Star Valley Health. The SCHD cannot mortgage buildings as collateral and lacks the revenue to use them as security, he added.

The SCHD recently launched a fundraising campaign through the Sublette County Health Foundation, a nonprofit entity that is a subsidiary to the hospital district. The creation of the foundation followed the approval of the USDA loan in June making the hospital a reality, completion of the merger between the SCHD and Sublette Center in December and unsuccessful negotiations to merge with the Green River Valley Health Foundation.

On Jan. 4, the district hired the Goettler Group, a company with expertise in organizing large capital fundraising projects.

In the few weeks since its inception, the foundation has received more than \$50,000 in donations or pledges, Kari DeWitt, Sublette County Health Foundation director, told the Roundup. The amount has more than covered the Goettler Group’s fees of \$8,000 per month for 6 months, she added.

Commissioner and public response

Commissioner Dave Stephens stated that he was “uncomfortable exceeding” the original \$20 million pledged by the county to construct a new Sublette Center in 2020. He recognized that the county possesses reserves, but the costs to maintain and operate the county are rising, stretching those reserves thin.

“It’s been said in this meeting right here (that) \$20 million is the max” the commissioners would pledge, Stephens said.

Commissioner Mack Bradley said he understood the \$20-million pledge was a “three-year-old number” set before the impacts of inflation, but hesitated to cover the entire \$9.2-million request.

“We all know there’s money available (in reserves), but like Dave (Stephens) said, there’s a lot of hands in the pot,” Bradley remarked. “At some point, we need to protect (our reserves). I’m willing to find a number, but it’s less than \$9.2 million.”

Noble referred the commissioners back to conferences held in the Sublette County School District No. 1 administration building in February 2020 – a series of day-long, intense negotiations between the Sublette County Rural Health Care District, the county and the Sublette Center. At that time, a hospital seemed like a “long shot,” Noble said.

“There are a lot of champions behind this project,” Noble added. “I give the Sublette Center board and the new hospital board a ton of credit. This is an outstanding project. We chose to reset health care in Sublette County years ago and we are close.”

Noble made the motion pledging \$20 million in 2020, and said on Feb. 7 he would make a similar pledge, committing \$29 million to the SCHD.

Dr. David Burnett, the commission chairman in 2020, stated that the “majority” of the commission sitting in 2020 would have approved \$30 million to account for inflation that no one could have predicted.

Commissioner Doug Vickrey compared the process of constructing and operating a multi-million dollar, modern hospital and long-term care facility to rehabilitating the Pinedale Rodeo Grounds in the 1960s.

The Rodeo Club put in plenty of “blood, sweat and tears and a lot of money” into fixing up the rodeo grounds 50 years ago.

“We beat the bushes to get people to help us,” Vickrey said. “Why in the hell did you wait until yesterday to put a foundation together to start raising money? If you don’t get out there and beat the bush yourself, this community will not respond to you. We still, 50 years later, do what is necessary to keep the (rodeo grounds) viable. I don’t see that happening here.”

The county gave enough to the SCHD – the \$20-million Sublette Center, revenue from Aspen Grove Apartments and \$1 million toward the purchase of the old ballfields from the Town of Pinedale, Vickrey said.

“You have done nothing compared to what the county gave you,” he berated. “This (project) does not have, in my mind, a snowball’s chance in hell of making it. It’s going to be a drag on the taxpayer.”

White reminded the board of the 2020 ballot initiative approving the formation of the SCHD and the county’s role in the process.

“I think that I owe it to the voters to at least chew on this for awhile,” White said. “I’m not ready to make a decision today. If I was forced to make a decision today, my answer would be, ‘No.’”

White encouraged the SCHD to explore fundraising options before the next commissioners’ meeting.

“I’ve seen this team do amazing things over the last couple of years,” he said. “I would really like to see what you get in the next couple of weeks.”

Bradley took issue with Vickrey’s remarks about the SCHD lacking “blood, sweat and tears.”

“The time you all have put into this is phenomenal,” he said. “Kudos to your efforts.”

The county faced a difficult decision, said former commissioner Mack Rawhouser.

“There are three things this county, in my mind, is responsible for,” he said. “One is road and bridge. The other is safety through the sheriff’s department and three is health care.”

Inflation was predictable phenomenon one year ago, argued Tami Crosson.

“I knew (inflation was coming),” she said. “It’s ridiculous that we’re even here.”

Mike Pompy, former chair of the Sublette County Rural Health Care Board, stressed the six years he served on the health-care board in the county without compensation.

“As far as this project is concerned, I, and past and present board members, have put in blood, sweat and tears.”



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