

LOCAL

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See A3



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LOCAL

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See A7

Pinedale Roundup

Newspaper of the Upper Green River Valley, Est. 1904

FEBRUARY 14, 2020

One Dollar

Future of health care Boards consider creating new hospital district

By Robert Galbreath
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PINEDALE – After a conference among various boards about the future of health care on Friday, Feb. 7, the chairmen of the Board of County Commissioners, Sublette County Rural Health Care District (SCRHCD) and Sublette Center met on Tuesday, Feb. 11, to consider creating a special hospital district.

At a special meeting called by the SCRHCD on Wednesday, Feb. 12, Chairman Wendy Boman announced that the three chairmen had formed a draft memorandum of understanding (MOU) to combine the health care entities under a new hospital district. She discussed the draft with the full board and public, emphasizing that talks are still in the preliminary stage.

Patty Racich, chairman of the Sublette Center board, confirmed to the Roundup that the Center's board also met on Wednesday to consider the proposal for a hospital district. The County Commissioners will discuss the MOU as a board at their Feb. 18 meeting.

If the three boards agree to move forward with the hospital district, the proposal will then go on the ballot in November.

A tale of two proposals

The idea for a hospital district emerged as an alternative to an impasse between the Sublette Center and RHCD about how to manage health care.

At the Feb. 7 meeting, the SCRHCD presented its proposal to "merge" the Sublette Center and district into one organization "owned by" the SCRHCD.

Both the Sublette Center and SCRHCD are on "financially unsustainable paths" unless they partner to build a critical access hospital and long-term living facility, said Dave Doom, administrative director at the SCRHCD. With a hospital, the District would receive a projected \$7 million in extra revenue from cost reimbursement through Medicare and private insurance, Doom added.

Doom's projections came from a financial "draft summary" released by Eide Bailly on the feasibility of building a \$51 million facility containing a critical access hospital, long-term living facility, memory care unit and shared facilities. Doom added that the \$51 million is a "conservative" estimate, and said he believed that costs will come in lower, particularly if the district takes advantage of low interest rates on offer by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Attorneys Nick Healey of Crowley and Fleck in Cheyenne, and Gaston Gosar of Pinedale, raised concerns about the financial projections presented by the SCRHCD. Healey worried that if the USDA loan is denied, and the Sublette Center is under district ownership, this would "jeopardize the future of senior care in Sublette County."

"We have a fiduciary and ethical obligation to ensure that

See 'HEALTH' on page 4A



MIKE MCFARLAND COURTESY PHOTO

Jan Allen gives a little V for victory after reading the state's acceptance of their bid for mineral rights under their property.

New Fork couple celebrates winning 5-year mineral lease

By Joy Ufford
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PINEDALE – Even with the official letter in their hands, Jan Allen and Mike McFarland were a bit cautious to celebrate the unusual status of becoming leaseholders to the mineral rights under their land to protect it from energy development.

On Monday, McFarland confirmed with the Office of State Lands and Investments that yes, his name is on the 242-acre parcel's lease for the next five years. In return, they will pay \$242 per year to the state, and any company that might want to use the surface must now negotiate with McFarland, Allen and the state of Wyoming. The actual lease is in the mail, literally, to be signed, notarized and returned.

"Then the state sends us our golden ticket," said Allen. "You can be sure we will keep it viable; protecting this magical spot is our path."

No place like home

The couple lives south of Pinedale along the New Fork River. Last summer, they learned to their and neighbors' dismay the state was auctioning off mineral rights underneath their property, neighbors, nearby businesses, subdivisions – and the riverbed itself – for the first time in July 2019.

McFarland and Allen learned that OSLI prefers to lease mineral rights to operators who will develop and bring in more state revenue. A minimum bid is \$1 an acre a year for a five-year lease.

They wrote OSLI officials, asking that the parcel not be listed to protect the river's rich habitat and wildlife. Jocelyn Moore, president of the Upper Green River Chapter of Trout Unlimited, also sent a letter of objection. OSLI officials said at

that time their comments were reviewed but lease stipulations are attached to protect the river-bottom property.

McFarland and Allen waited on pins and needles but no one bid on the parcel. However, it would come up for auction again in November 2019.

If a state lease is not sold after two auctions, it becomes available "over the counter to the first qualified applicant expressing interest." A "qualified" person is a U.S. citizen over the age of 19. The over-the-counter application window was closing on Dec. 6, 2019.

OSLI Deputy Director Holly Dyer said the state office's goal and duty is to bring in operators whose development brings in the most revenue. Individuals can participate in the initial auctions and have, but OSLI prefers to get higher bids than the minimum.

Taking a stand

After talking to friends and family, McFarland and Allen decided to investigate and learned an individual applicant does not need a development plan. With guidance from former OSLI employee Tate Smith, McFarland submitted their application with the \$1-acre bid plus a \$50 processing fee. Although both own their home and property, they were advised to only put one name on the application.

The State Loan and Investment Board would meet on Feb. 7 to look over McFarland's bid – "I won't feel better until we know we've been approved," he said at the time.

Fingers crossed

"It was all a matter of people directing us to the avenues anyone can find to do this and protect what we all need to," Allen said in her Feb. 6 email. "Got to dig your heels in and not give up, right?"

See 'LEASE' on page 4A

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HEALTH

Continued from 1A

the Center and the seniors have a voice in their health care.”

Gosar questioned the ability for the SCRHCD to financially sustain its proposed project, citing a declining gas and oil industry and downward trends in the county’s population and revenue. He also discussed the high number of uninsured people in the community and the state’s refusal to join Medicaid Expansion as other factors. An attempt to put Medicaid expansion on the State Legislature’s 2020 agenda for a full vote failed in committee on the Monday following the meeting.

Healey outlined a counterproposal to turn the Sublette Center into a “county memorial hospital” funded by the county under a governing board appointed by the commissioners. The proposal hinged on the hope that legislation to create a senior health care services district will pass through the Legislature. A bill to create these districts failed in the Senate last year, but passed through the Joint Labor, Health and Social Services Interim Committee to be introduced in the 2020 legislative session.

A third alternative – the hospital district. Wyoming state statute allows for an elected board of five to seven trustees to govern a hospital district and levy up to 6 mills. Commissioner Tom Noble explained at the Feb. 7 meeting that a proposed hospital district must go before the public on a ballot in November. Upon approval by the county and voters, once a new hospital district board is elected, the

Up next

The Sublette County Rural Health Care Board, Sublette County Commissioners and Sublette Center Board of Directors, with representatives from the three towns, meet at 9 a.m. Monday, Feb. 17, at the Sublette School District No. 1 Central Administration Building Board Room, 655 S. Tyler, Ave. The meeting is open to the public, and public comments will be accepted.

SCRHCD and Sublette Center boards would dissolve.

Burnett stated on Feb. 7 that a hospital district will “solve the governance issue” by creating a single board to operate both a critical access hospital and long-term care facility. Burnett proposed levying 3 mills for the district in Sublette County.

In the meantime, before the issue went to ballot, the SCRHCD and Sublette Center could sign a memorandum of understanding to work together to form a hospital district. The SCRHCD can also move forward with its loan application to the USDA and possibly start construction on the hospital.

SCRHCD meeting

On Feb. 12, the SCRHCD board and administrators discussed concerns over the draft MOU in a public meeting in Marbleton. Boman brought up taxation and the future of health care at the Marbleton-Big Piney Clinic as possible “hiccups.”

With the formation of a hospital district



ROBERT GALBREATH PHOTO

Members of boards and the public discuss the future of health care in small groups on Friday, Feb. 7. Pictured, from left, are Sublette Center board member Karen Snow, Sharon Rutsch, clinical services coordinator at the Rural Health Care District, Vicky Marshall, trauma coordinator at the RHCD, Mike Pompey, trustee on the RHCD board and Sam Bixler, economic development consultant.

levied at 3 mills, the additional mill would equal roughly \$2 million in tax revenue, Boman said. For homeowners, this means an extra \$19 in property taxes for a \$200,000 home and \$47.50 for a \$500,000 home, Boman said.

While homeowners pay their share, Boman added that the energy sector contributes most of the county’s revenue.

“I’m worried about industry because they contribute 90 percent of our taxes,” she said. “That’s a huge burden for them.”

Board members and the public also talked about how the hospital district will affect the SCRHCD’s goal to provide after-hours care in

Marbleton and Big Piney.

“The Marbleton Clinic is my highest priority,” said Sam Bixler, economic development consultant. “But that project won’t get underway until we solve the hospital issue.”

The SCRHCD did not pass any motions or commit to the MOU, but agreed at the end of the meeting to move forward with negotiations on a hospital district to keep the Sublette Center at the table.

In the meantime, the board also agreed to continue with the loan process and negotiating the purchase of the ball fields from the Town of Pinedale.

LEASE

Continued from 1A

She called OSLI’s Smith “the hero in much of this for us.”

They and many others now know that when a lease parcel goes unsold twice, anyone can apply for it “over the counter” with a minimum bid of \$1 per acre.

“I’m guessing that \$242 (a year) is better than nothing,” Allen added. “We aren’t unique; anyone can apply for a parcel and the lease is good for five years.”

At the end of five years, Dyer explained that the couple can apply for an extension but

changing circumstances in the oil and gas industry might affect their getting an extension – “It’s a case-by-case situation.”

McFarland said he hopes people in similar situations take heart from their success and work together.

“When we were battling this, it felt like we were going against the tide,” he said. “It’s a matter of people realizing they can stand up and work together if they believe in the same outcome. We’ve been fortunate; we’re keeping our fingers crossed to be able to continue.”

Community Mental Health Support Group

Next Meeting Time: Thursday February 20th, 7:00-8:00 PM
Meeting Location: School Administration Board Room
655 North Tyler Avenue, Pinedale

If you are facing mental health challenges and have a desire to achieve wellness, gain support, connect with others and learn about helpful resources, we welcome you to attend. Family and friends are also welcome.

***Please note that this is an adult group for anyone over the age of 18.*

Wind River Mental Health Advocacy Alliance is a new, non-affiliated resource dedicated to supporting and improving mental health in our community.

For more information, call or text (307) 360-7926

“Supporting Mental Wellness Through Caring, Connectivity and Resourcefulness”



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