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See **A16**



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# Pinedale Roundup

Newspaper of the Upper Green River Valley, Est. 1904

MARCH 12, 2021

One Dollar

## St. John's withdraws from partner consideration

*District loses legal counsel*

**By Robert Galbreath**  
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**MARBLETON** – St. John's Health withdrew its management proposal from consideration with the Sublette County Hospital District, board chairwoman Tonia Hoffman announced at a special meeting on March 10.

The board received informal notice of the announcement from St. John's

leadership team, led by CEO Will Wagon, on Wednesday, Hoffman said. The board did not receive a formal letter containing the announcement as of press time and Hoffman stated that the board will make that letter public once it's received.

"This has been really difficult, as we have always considered St. John's Hospital an excellent candidate for partnership and have sustained affiliations (with St. John's) for many years," Hoffman added. "After having a thorough and positive conversation with Mr. Wagon, the new

CEO, I don't anticipate a change in these affiliations or in the services that Sublette County residents will undoubtedly continue to seek from St. John's and its affiliates."

Hoffman stressed that the hospital district will continue to be good neighbors and grow relationships with St. John's to maintain affordable and high-quality health care in Sublette County.

"It is my hope that we all have seats at a larger table through the next 10 to 15 years as health care in Sublette County continues to evolve," Hoffman stated.

Hoffman said that during her conversation with Wagon, the CEO said the decision to withdraw was a difficult one. St. John's did not feel that it was the right time to take on an additional project in Sublette County, Hoffman reported from her conversation with Wagon.

Hoffman cited several reasons Wagon outlined for withdrawing the proposal: the hit St. John's took during the COVID-19 outbreak in Teton County, Wagon's status as a new leader and ongoing work on the

See 'ST. JOHN'S' on page **A6**

## Short term rental ordinance narrowly passes 1st reading

**By Robert Galbreath**  
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**PINEDALE** – An ordinance establishing requirements for short-term rentals in residentially zoned areas passed its first reading by the Pinedale Town Council at its March 8 meeting. The final vote was 3-2, with Mayor Matt Murdock and Councilman Dean Loftus voting against the motion to adopt the ordinance. Councilmembers Isaac Best, Judi Boyce and Tyler Swafford voted in favor.

The council tabled the ordinance at its last meeting following several hours of discussion. The ordinance requires two additional readings before the council.

Short-term rentals are outlawed by existing town ordinances, Murdock emphasized at the meeting.

The purpose of the ordinance, drafted by the town's planning and zoning commission, is to permit short-term rentals within town limits under certain restrictions, Murdock said. Short-term rentals are a growing industry and can generate revenue for property owners and the wider community, Murdock added.

The ordinance was intended to find a balance between acknowledging that short-term rentals are here to stay while protecting the integrity of residential neighborhoods, Murdock stated.

The primary issue of contention among council members was whether to allow hosted or non-hosted short-term rentals in residential areas. The proposed ordinance includes language allowing non-hosted short-term rentals as long as the owner lives within 30 miles of the property.

Best, a member of the planning and zoning commission, said the original draft included the 30-mile restriction to allow flexibility for people to own short-term rentals across Sublette County.

See 'ORDINANCE' on page **A6**



TRAVIS BINGHAM PHOTO, SCSO DRONE FOOTAGE

Attendees of the Public Avalanche Awareness class get practice locating buried beacons and using newly learned probing and shoveling techniques in February 2020.

## Historic avalanche season takes its toll on responders

**By Brady Oltmans**  
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**SUBLETTE COUNTY** – It's a deafening hush that surrounds the backcountry. Fresh powder having fallen for days on end welcomes the adventurous outdoorsman with enticing promises of fun. It's a diabolical trap in place, waiting for just the right movement to trigger tragedy.

This winter has brought the deadliest avalanche season in American history. Last season saw 23 avalanche-related deaths. This winter has already brought 25 at the

last monthly tabulation in February, with plenty of winter left.

Teton County, at one point, responded to three avalanche-related deaths in a span of five days. And, according to Cody Lockhart at Teton Search and Rescue, the near misses were daily during that stretch.

The Bridger-Teton Avalanche Center lists 61 avalanches of varying degrees in Teton County backcountry since Feb. 1. Two of those caused fatalities to snowmobilers in backcountry conditions. Another was a snowboarder who, unlike everyone else in the group he was skiing with, didn't escape

a slab while going downhill near Togwotee Pass.

The Bridger-Teton Avalanche Center lists Wyoming's regions at moderate risk of avalanche as of March 3. Lockhart said that could be worse – Colorado and Utah, for example, have experienced sensitive snowfall this winter – but that also means those playing in the country should be conscious of conditions.

"The avalanche that killed a young snowboarder up on Togwotee, that slid to the ground," Lockhart said. "Every piece

See 'AVALANCHE' on page **A6**





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# Church DIRECTORY

**Pinedale Community United Church of Christ**  
115 S Maybell, Pinedale  
Interim pastoral care: Rev. Randy Belton  
Worship is 10 a.m. Sunday mornings  
In-person worship with COVID protocols observed, and live on Facebook.  
For information and updates call: 307-264-0418  
Email us at: [communitychurchpinedale@gmail.com](mailto:communitychurchpinedale@gmail.com)  
Visit the website: [pinedalecommunityucc.org](http://pinedalecommunityucc.org)

**First Baptist Church**  
Pastor Ted York  
SUNDAY SERVICE  
Sunday school.....9:45 a.m.  
Morning worship.....11 a.m.  
646 N. Tyler Street • 307-367-4567

**OUR SAVIOR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
Bible study.....7:45 a.m.  
Sunday Service.....9 a.m.  
Pastor Kevin Rose  
307-367-2612  
512 N. Tyler, Pinedale

**Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church**  
112 S. Sublette Ave  
Mass Schedule  
Saturday: 5:30 p.m.  
Monday: 9 a.m. at Church  
Sunday: 8 a.m.  
Tuesday: 5:30 p.m. at Church  
Holy Day of Obligation: 7 a.m. & 7 p.m.  
Wednesday-Friday: 7 a.m. at Church

**Church of the Resurrection**  
Hope that in God ALL things are possible  
PO Box 2144, Pinedale WY 82941  
Join us for Sunday Morning Services at 10 a.m. at 41 S. Lake Ave. Sunday School is available for children.  
For questions, call us at (307) 367-3500 or write to us at [ChurchoftheResurrection.Wyo@gmail.com](mailto:ChurchoftheResurrection.Wyo@gmail.com)

*"Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."*  
-Jesus Christ  
**Pinedale Bible Church**  
Sunday School Service 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.  
Sunday Worship Service 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.  
Livestream of worship service 10:30 a.m.  
Come visit us at 219 Industrial Site Rd. • 367-4168  
Pastor Jim Silvey

## ORDINANCE

Continued from 1A

Murdock voiced opposition to allowing non-hosted rentals in Pinedale and wanted the 30-mile provision removed, limiting the ordinance to hosted operations that require the property owner to live on site. He argued that short-term rentals had a significant and adverse affect on the nature of residential areas, leading to a transient population, vacant properties and a rise in housing costs.

Best stated that the principal of the ordinance was not to take away the ability for people to operate short-term rentals but to find a legal avenue for them to operate. He argued in favor of allowing non-hosted short-term rentals.

Swafford questioned the scope of the problem and asked Abram Pearce, Pinedale's director of public works, how many short-term rentals actually existed in the town.

Pearce responded that coming to an exact figure was difficult. He estimated that between 25 to 30 short-term rentals were operating at the time, although half that figure included established hotels and motels using short-term rental sites like Airbnb to book rooms, Pearce said.

Swafford added that he believed the ordinance needed more work and the council had tough decisions to make in weighing individual property rights with protecting

residential neighborhoods.

Murdock warned that allowing non-hosted short-term rentals within a certain geographical zone could open the Pandora's box for future councils to expand. Loftus also voiced concern about opening up possibilities for people living in Rock Springs or Jackson to own and operate non-hosted short-term rentals in Pinedale, and stressed a desire to keep the operations local.

### In other town news

The council passed a motion to amend Ordinance 683 to prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products within town limits. The town passed a similar amendment over a year ago that had since expired. Murdock stated that the Sublette County Sheriff's Office and Prevention Coalition backed the amendment as an effective way to limit the use of e-cigarettes and vaping products among minors.

Best argued that he was unable to find any studies that claimed vaping products produced by established companies like JUUL were more dangerous than other tobacco products. The problem lay with vaping items sold on the black market, Best said, and he added that attempting to control the sale of certain items would only encourage the production of illicit products. The vote was 4-1 with Best voting against.

## AVALANCHE

Continued from 1A

of drainage slid and it just took the perfect recipe of jumping on it and sliding on it the perfect way to trigger that.

"That's the scary part. You never know what's going on. Conditions lined up just right for that to happen."

It's been a similar eerie silence for Sublette County's TipTop Search and Rescue. Outside of a rescue by Horse Creek last month, Kenna Tanner has been counting her blessings they haven't been called to respond to more accidents.

Since the start of February there have been two avalanches in northern Sublette County and five by Wyoming Peak straight west of Marbleton and Big Piney.

To her, it seems the avalanche dangers grow every year with the multiple levels of snowpack, advancement in machinery and the growing amount of people looking to isolated western Wyoming to escape encroaching urbanity.

"It takes weather, people and terrain to create a bad scenario," Tanner said. "Unfortunately, snowpack seems to get worse and worse. You add the increase of participation, it's a deadly combination."

For that Horse Creek rescue in particular, the inclement weather meant TipTop responders had to wait for county plows to clear roads. The dangers that caused a possible avalanche remained, with the added hurdles of weather, darkness and a needed path to locate those in need.

Tanner said she's not sure if this avalanche season is worse but, to her, it seems the danger seems to be higher for longer periods of time.

It's all about the unpredictability. Weeks like this last one could settle snow, or the melt could add moisture and weight to

vulnerable regions.

"You can't blindly go out," Tanner said. "You've got to do your homework ahead of time. Know what your limitations are."

Tanner and Lockhart, like every other search-and-rescue member in Wyoming, are volunteers. They've responded to rescue calls under inclement and, frankly, dangerous conditions. Sometimes the person they pull out of the slide already died. And that person's time between survival and death could rely on the timeliness and safety with which rescue crews respond.

That carries a high emotional toll for responders. Lockhart remembered having seven calls for service over a week span in mid-February. He was asked about responding to three fatalities in that stretch. His daughter interrupted his answer to tell him it was time to come eat. It was burger night. He told her that sounded good and he'd be right there when he got off the phone.

"When you have a busy week like we've had, three fatalities in a week, that's a lot to stack on a volunteer," Lockhart said. "Get in this helicopter, dig someone out of an avalanche, give them CPR, make sure your kids are happy and do it again the next day."

"All the search-and-rescue members throughout the state sacrifice a lot and it doesn't go without paying the mental and emotional price." Tanner stressed the importance of knowing routes, going with friends, sticking to arranged plans and knowing your own limitations when planning a day of play. She shared a sentiment that's stuck with her since she first heard it.

"Going out is an option," she said, "coming home isn't."

## ST. JOHN'S

Continued from 1A

skilled nursing living facility in Jackson associated with St. John's.

Dr. Brendan Fitzsimmons stated that in conversations with Wagon and Michelle Kren, St. John's chief financial officer, St. John's affirmed that it has no intention to enter Sublette County as competition in the health-care market.

"I think we all just want to be good neighbors and do the right things for our communities," Hoffman said.

Star Valley Health and Eastern Idaho Medical Center, owned by HCA Healthcare, remain contenders for a management agreement with the hospital district.

The board also received notice from its new attorney, Tom Lubnau in Gillette,

that his firm was unable to provide legal counsel to the district.

"Circumstances identified conflicts that were previously unknown, making it impossible for counsel to continue," Hoffman read from a statement.

The board is interviewing new legal counsel, Hoffman said. She added that the trustees hoped to have someone in place by the regular meeting on March 17.

Both setbacks "have given us pause and complicated the decision making process we've been working through," Hoffman said. The final decision on a management partner is a heavy one that includes many factors, Hoffman said.

"It is very critical to make a good decision rather than a quick one."