

Questions and answers on the hospital district

By Robert Galbreath, rgalbreath@subletteexaminer.com

MARBLETON – Representatives from county entities met with the public to discuss the ballot initiative to create a hospital district on Aug. 12. The session took place at the Southwest Sublette County Pioneers Senior Citizen Center in Marbleton.

The event included county commissioners Dr. David Burnett and Mac Rawhouser, Sublette County Rural Health Care Board trustees Tonia Hoffman and Mike Pompy, Kenda Tanner with the Sublette Center board, Dawn Walker, Sublette Center administrator, Dave Doorn, SCRHCD administrative director, Bill Kluck, EMS operations director and Billie Hamby, veteran services officer.

Q: How is the USDA grant process going?

Doorn responded that the SCRHCD prepared a preliminary architectural report, “a basic layout” for the proposed building to house the Sublette Center and critical access hospital. The district is “redoing” the financial forecasts for the project with Eide Bailly, he said. He expressed confidence that the district will be “ready to apply for that USDA funding as soon as the (November) vote happens.”

Q: You are considering partnerships with places like St. John’s (for management). Hospitals like St. John’s are down on revenue due to COVID-19 and struggling financially. Can you address this?

Doorn stated that “all hospitals are struggling” due to the pandemic and services like surgery have slowed. He added that hospitals are “trying to get back on track” and are waiting for relief from the state.

Q: How much will the mill levy go up for homeowners?

If a hospital district is approved, the mill



JOAN MITCHELL PHOTOS

County Commissioners Mac Rawhouser and Dr. David Burnett listen during the Q & A session about the hospital district ballot initiative at the Marbleton Senior Center.

levied would go from two to three mills, costing \$20 more per year on a \$200,000 home, Doorn replied.

Q: Will the additional mill be permanent or will it last only until the USDA loan is paid off?

The additional mill is permanent unless there is a vote to change the levy, Doorn said.

Q: We own a cattle ranch. How much

is the additional levy going to cost large land owners?

Hoffman replied that she discussed the issue with the county assessor. The assessor assured her that the additional tax levied would be “minimal for landowners with agricultural land just as it is for someone with a regular home.” She added that she is working with the assessor to “get some examples of what that would look like” for large landowners.

Q: How large will the assisted living facility and critical access hospital be?

The preliminary plans call for 44 rooms in the long-term care wing, Doorn said. The Sublette Center’s “census usually runs in the 30s or 40s,” he added. The plans include a 12-bed “secure” memory care unit for patients with Alzheimer’s. Of the 44 rooms, 40 will be “private rooms” and four “semi-private,” Doorn said. There are also plans for a negative pressure room for people that may come down with COVID-19, he continued.

Doorn stated that the plan for the critical access hospital involves an emergency room and 10 in-patient rooms. Doorn discussed additional services like “a more sophisticated lab” in the hospital that can store blood for traumas.

Q: Can the hospital district levy up to an additional 3 mills?

Burnett explained that hospital districts can “levy up to six mills with the approval of

the voters.”

Q: If there is a memory unit, will Sublette County residents get first priority or will it be open to people from all around?

Doorn responded that when he managed the Sublette Center, preference went to Sublette County residents. The center was “never in a position” where it was full enough to press that kind of decision, he said. In terms of a future assisted living facility, Doorn stated, “I can’t tell you for sure on that.”

Q: Can you discuss what advantages the critical access hospital would provide for veterans?

Veterans are covered for up to three emergency care visits, but these visits have to be an approved emergency room, she said. Hamby continued that if a patient is taken to the Pinedale or Marbleton Clinic and stabilized, or if a veteran has to be transported to another facility, those costs are not currently covered. The presence of a hospital and full emergency room “would be huge for the veterans for our county” in terms of providing quality care that is covered by their benefits.

Q: Can you discuss your plans for mental health care?

A Title 25 room to “put someone that’s in distress in a safe place” is part of the plans, Doorn said. Doorn mentioned contracting with Eastern Idaho Medical Center to provide a psychiatrist through telemedicine.

Continued on page 3

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About Ted O. Morgan, Jr., MD

Board-certified in urology, Dr. Morgan attended Georgetown University School of Medicine and completed his residency at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. He completed post-graduation training in female urology and urodynamics at the University of Texas.

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Members of the public listen in during a Q & A session about the hospital district ballot initiative. Pictured, from left, are Dick Wenz, Zach Wenz, Georgia Wenz and Barbara Wells.



Dave Doorn, SCRHCD administrative director, fields questions at the Q & A session.



SCRHCD trustee Tonia Hoffman, Sublette Center board member Kenda Tanner, Veteran Services Officer Billie Hamby and Selena Brown participate in the Q & A session about the hospital district ballot initiative.

Continued from page 2

Q: What happens to the Sublette Center and CAH if the hospital district project fails to pass? Are there a Plan B and Plan C?

Doorn said the board and district discuss alternative plans "all the time." In his view, the "goal is to keep going, to keep trying" regardless of what happens in November. Plans to submit an application to the USDA as a rural health care center is still possible.

Hoffman added, "it's safe to say that the (SCRHCD) board is equally committed with the Sublette Center" in "trying to move this (project) forward no matter how the vote goes."

Pompy stated that the SCRHCD "has been pursuing" the application "for some time"

and can continue to work with their partners if the vote fails. The financial reports show that a critical access hospital is possible with the current 2 mills levied.

Q: How many financial assessments have been done? Were they carried out by a third party?

Doorn replied that the financial reports were "all done by third parties." The district is using Eide Bailly.

Q: How will the hospital district affect EMS services?

The hospital will "make Kluck's job easier" because ambulances would not have to transfer emergency patients out of the county in all cases. Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for emergency transport is only available with a critical access hospital,

Kluck added.

Q: Hospital care can raise prices for care. How will that affect people's out-of-pocket payments?

The amount paid out of pocket and deductibles "will remain the same," Doorn said. The difference is that "more of your claims that go to your insurance companies will be paid because we are a hospital," he said.

Q: Why does Big Piney have to give up everything for Pinedale?

Doorn replied the district is "doing everything we can to preserve care down here." The district is now "fully staffed" with eight providers including "two to three" in Marbleton/Big Piney, he said. The x-ray equipment was upgraded in Big Piney. He did add that the "volume" in Pinedale is higher.

Upcoming Q & A's:

- Aug. 18, 12 p.m. at the Big Piney Post Office Park
- Aug. 19, 5:30 p.m. at the Pinedale Library
- Aug. 21, 5:30 p.m. at the Rendezvous Meadows Golf Course in Pinedale
- Aug. 24, 5:30 p.m. at the American Legion Park in Pinedale
- Aug. 27, 5:30 p.m., Daniel Schoolhouse
- Sept. 1-2 – Sublette County Chamber of Commerce mixers, locations TBD
- Sept. 9, 12:30 p.m. at Rendezvous Pointe in Pinedale
- Sept. 10, 6 p.m. at the Elkhorn Bar in Bondurant
- Sept. 19, 1 p.m., Marbleton Senior Center

Joan Mitchell stated that the people in Big Piney need to "start asking" to get things done and discussed the "accomplishments" already achieved in Big Piney and Marbleton like the airport, fairgrounds and senior center.

Hoffman added that the hospital district would provide opportunities to "expand care" in Big Piney and Marbleton.

Kluck explained that the EMTs rotate crews to provide coverage for Big Piney and Marbleton. There is always an ambulance in Big Piney, he added.

Q: What would happen to the Sublette Center if the project is not approved by vote?

Walker stated that the future would be "decidedly different" if the vote does not go through and a new building would be "off the table." The Sublette Center is aging and costs to rebuild are "astronomical." Sublette Center residents "deserve" the benefits that a new facility would provide, she said.

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