

# County debates broadband choices

By Holy Dabb, hdabb@subletteexaminer.com

**PINEDALE** – While Union Wireless has invested in laying fiber to Pinedale, it is unclear if Sublette County can use the competition to trim its \$13,932 monthly expense paid to CenturyLink for Internet services.

IT Systems Engineer Michael Christie asked the Sublette County Commissioners for direction during the May 20 commissioners' meeting.

The county has a metro Ethernet set up through CenturyLink that connects 15 separate county facilities.

Christie said the county is being overcharged, CenturyLink offers limited support and speeds are slower than available in other locations.

While Union is offering to connect the Courthouse, Public Health, Road and Bridge, Pinedale Fire Hall, Library, Maintenance and the County Attorney's Office

right away, facilities such as the Fairgrounds and Marbleton Sheriff's Office may need to wait two or three years to get connected.

Union estimated the cost for seven of the 15 facilities would be \$7,555, which is more than paid CenturyLink for the same seven facilities, but the speeds offered would be 10 times faster.

County Attorney Mike Crosson said his office needs the higher speeds. As the Sublette County Sheriff's Department has gone with body cameras, he said his office must provide defense attorneys with the videos. Uploading the videos takes a staff member hours.

Christie said to go with Union Wireless the county will need to keep its communication systems with CenturyLink for a couple more years to ensure connectivity – especially between the dispatch center in

Pinedale and the backup dispatch center in Marbleton.

"I don't want to pay twice," Christie said.

He added, it still is unknown if the Decision Summary on file with CenturyLink is legally binding. In fact, he only learned one day before the meeting who the county's customer service representative is with CenturyLink.

Commissioners asked Christie to continue researching and to come back with a proposal before budget. Commissioner David Burnett said the commissioners can't make a decision without complete information.

"CenturyLink has never had to answer questions before," Christie said.

In other actions:

- Commissioners rescinded a motion passed during the May 5 meeting to update

Planning and Zoning rules. Several residents turned out, saying the comment period on zone changes was shortened to 14 days, not giving the public enough time. Others said they felt moving items for outdoors uses was catering to a proposed resort application.

Dennis Fornstrom said he shortened the notification period to meet needed advertising deadlines and prevent two-month delays between when the Planning and Zoning Commission meets and the County Commissioners meet. He added, a lengthy notification period just meant people forget the issue.

After rescinding the rule changes, commissioners asked Fornstrom to work with Deputy County Attorney Clayton Melinkovich and take the rules back to Planning and Zoning for a public hearing.

## Sublette Center and RHCD commit to hospital district

By Robert Galbreath, rgalbreath@subletteexaminer.com

**PINEDALE** – The long-awaited memorandum of understanding that followed months of wrangling between the Sublette Center and Sublette County Rural Health Care District was signed and released last week.

The Sublette Center voted to accept and sign the MOU at a meeting on May 18. Sublette Center board Chairman Patty Racich signed the agreement that day. At a special meeting on May 12, the SCRHCD voted, 4-1, to accept the MOU. Chairman Wendy Boman signed the document on May 21.

Under the MOU, both parties commit to working together to merge "their respective health care operations" to "create a new health-care system ... owned, operated and governed by a newly created Wyoming special hospital district."

This document is not a legally binding merger and does not allow one party to purchase the other. The document is an agreement between the parties to cooperate on the project to form a hospital district and "publicly support" its creation on the November ballot.

### Compromise on finances

During negotiations this winter between the Sublette Center, SCRHCD and Sublette County Board of County Commissioners, the idea to form a new hospital district emerged as a compromise to break the deadlock between the agencies.

Finances and assets remained at the center of the gridlock and led to different proposals at the conferences.

The SCRHCD initially offered to buy the Sublette Center and operate a long-term care facility, the clinics and a proposed critical access hospital under the ownership of the rural health care district.

The Sublette Center proposed a new

senior health care district, hinging upon passage of legislation in Cheyenne this winter. In the meantime, the Sublette Center would request permission from the county to form a "county memorial hospital." Under this plan, the Sublette Center and SCRHCD would remain separate agencies under the umbrella of a joint powers board.

Once the SCRHCD and Sublette Center agreed to draft an MOU, conflict continued over real estate. At the initial meetings between the boards, the Sublette Center's attorneys expressed concern about committing real estate and finances to a project with an uncertain future.

At a special meeting hosted by the SCRHCD on Feb. 12, the trustees discussed the draft. They disagreed with proposals in the MOU that would hand ownership of the Marbleton Clinic back to the county. The trustees also disputed the Sublette Center maintaining control of some assets as a separate entity, including Aspen Grove, in case the hospital district project fell apart.

The SCRHCD trustees believed that both sides had to place all assets under a new hospital district, responding with "all or nothing" at the Feb. 12 meeting.

The final version of the MOU signed and released this month requires both parties to transfer "all of property, operations, assets and liabilities to the hospital district," if voters approve it in November.

Once a hospital district is approved, all facilities, including a proposed critical access hospital and long-term care facility, EMS and both clinics, would be "owned, operated and governed" by a new hospital district board elected that November.

The transfer of each agency's property is dependent upon the creation of a hospital district and adoption of bylaws by a

newly-elected hospital board. Until then, each organization will maintain control of its assets.

### Governance

The final, signed version of the MOU establishes a "joint planning committee" consisting of "an equal number of representatives" from the SCRHCD and Sublette Center.

The MOU gives the joint planning committee the ability to "plan and approve all arrangements" for the creation of a new health-care system under the governance of a future hospital district board. The committee is empowered to "negotiate and approve ... management services, major equipment and key personnel matters, financial arrangements and facility site planning and design."

Following its meeting on May 20, the SCRHCD approved a motion to create a four-person joint planning committee with two representatives from the Sublette Center and SCRHCD boards.

The committee will not operate as a public board, Dave Doorn, administrative director for the SCRHCD, explained to the Examiner. Two representatives from the SCRHCD do not constitute a quorum that would require a public meeting.

The MOU does contain a clause that all "final actions" made by the joint planning committee must be approved by both the SCRHCD board of trustees and the Sublette Center board. The Sublette Center is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization and its board can operate privately.

The SCRHCD board of trustees requires public meetings to approve actions or contracts made by the joint planning committee. If the joint planning committee were to approve the purchase of five new ventilator machines, this action would still have to go before the

SCRHCD board at a public meeting.

The joint planning committee can assist with the USDA loan application to fund the critical access hospital. Another clause in the MOU allows the SCRHCD "to continue its loan application" as a rural health care district "with the intent that the loan be transferred to the hospital district."

The issue of waiting to apply for a loan until the formation of a hospital district was a sticking point for members of the SCRHCD board.

### Other key points

If voters OK a hospital district in November, the SCRHCD "will remain in existence until the next general election," when voters can decide to dissolve the organization. During the period between the approval of a hospital district and the hospital district's first tax levy, the SCRHCD is required to "turn over all taxes levied on its behalf" to the hospital district.

In case voters do not approve the hospital district in November, the MOU and any transactions or contracts made on its behalf "shall be deemed terminated." The Sublette Center and the SCRHCD can still pursue a separate merger agreement.

The reversion clause contained in earlier drafts – allowing the county to recapture the clinics if certain terms are not met – is not included in the signed MOU.

The MOU can exist as long as both parties work "in good faith efforts" toward "the merger" to create a new health-care system within one year of the signatures, in the case that assets are transferred to form a hospital district or both parties mutually agree to terminate the MOU.

Both parties are responsible for legal and consultant fees they incurred working toward the "consummation" of the MOU.

### Weather for Sublette County, WY

May 26 - June 1

Today	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon
 <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">64°</span> <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">41°</span>	 <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">66°</span> <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">37°</span>	 <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">72°</span> <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">41°</span>	 <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">79°</span> <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">44°</span>	 <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">78°</span> <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">48°</span>	 <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">86°</span> <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">48°</span>	 <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">84°</span> <span style="font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">45°</span>
Precip: 54% Wind: WNW at 8 mph UV Index: 8 Very High						