

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

In spite of recent projects hospital still facing big challenges

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POMEROY, WA – The Commissioners of Garfield County Hospital District will meet in two separate sessions this week to discuss the state of the hospital physical plant. Just last week the Commissioners approved a plan for the emergency replacement of the Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system in the Districts’ Long term care building. Now the attention of the district will turn to another major system in the facility; the hospitals electrical wiring. The challenge that the district faces is that the facility, built in 1948, does not meet the current electrical code and the district is feeling pressure from state agencies to correct the problem.

This past year facility inspectors from the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries cited the building for having two services installed over the past decade without the correct electrical permitting. In order to comply with the re-inspection and permitting process the district will have to submit plans to the state agency showing the hospital does not meet the current electrical power standards. “We have met all the electrical code requirements with the exception of two related the installation of certain equipment that happened over the past few years. It’s pretty much impossible for us to comply with these standards” said hospital CEO, Andrew Craigie. “The fact is that this facility was built in 1948 and the current code will more than likely require us to rewire the entire facility.” This is a major problem for the district in that the cost of such an electrical upgrade could cost upwards of \$1M; money the district does not have.

According to a preliminary planning document released by the district; “The district must develop and execute on a plan that substantially addresses the immediate and long range physical plant needs of the organization. This will require a range of options to be developed and presented to the board of commissioners and the community for consideration. The most emergent concern is the replacement of the long term care HVAC unit. Following a parallel process the district must approach L&I with a proposal to address the electrical issues and minimally seek a variance (compliance waiver) until compliance can be achieved.”

The commissioners will discuss the facility needs in the regular meeting April 7 at 6:00 p.m. and continue this discussion at a retreat scheduled for the following day from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Representatives from the districts’ CPA firm and architecture company are expected to join the commissioners for this discussion. Among the alternatives commissioners will discuss:

- Seeking a permanent variance from the department of Labor and Industries
- Seeking a temporary variance from the department of Labor and Industries presented together with plan for compliance
- Seeking approval to disconnect and relocate the services that are out of compliance essentially placing the facility in a “grandfathered” state that existed prior to the unauthorized improvements.
- Reconfiguring the long term care and perform the necessary modifications to accommodate some or all of the existing hospital services and re-designate the existing hospital space to an acceptable occupancy classification

- Or constructing a replacement for the existing hospital either on the present footprint of the building or as an addition to the facility.

Due to the hospitals special Medicare designation as a Critical Access Hospital the Commissioners have to carefully consider the potential impact on reimbursement that would result from any change in the use of the facility. “It is a delicate balancing act” said Craigie. We have to work very hard to make sure we are capturing every dollar so we can remain sustainable.” The District will report net excess revenue of just over \$175K year to date through February and has set aside a small amount of reserves for capital repair and equipment replacement. “The fact is we still live pretty much month to month. These projects will be a big bite for the district. We really need to consider very carefully where we go from here.”

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