

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Facilities Planning a Priority for Hospital

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POMEROY, WA – The Commissioners of Garfield County Hospital District met twice this week to discuss the future of the hospital facilities. Joining the Commissioners were representatives of the districts’ architectural firm and Certified Public Accountant. The experts were on hand to discuss the alternatives available to the district as they contend with the issue of an aging hospital building. Facing mounting pressure from the state electrical inspector to modernize the existing hospital in order to meet current code requirements, the discussion included an assessment of the current healthcare environment, numerous challenges of dealing with a building that was constructed in 1948, and the potential impact of Medicare & Medicaid reimbursement on the decision process.

“The building is safe and has been well maintained” said architect John McClean. “The problem is that a building built in 1948 is not going to meet today’s more stringent standards for hospital grade construction.” To bring the building up to the more current standards will require a significant investment. “We are concerned because we know that the electrical systems are just the tip of the iceberg” said hospital CEO Andrew Craigie. Once we touch those systems we have many other areas that will need to be addressed including asbestos, plumbing, air quality, lighting, medical gases, and substandard patient rooms. The list is pretty long.” State agencies won’t allow the hospital to continue to operate without an acceptable plan to improve the facility so the district is working diligently to develop alternatives that meet the approval of regulators.

In a five hour strategy meeting that followed the regular board meeting, commissioners mulled over facility alternatives including community need and financing options. The districts' architect and accountant have been charged with refining the options before presenting them to the community. "We are working on at least two alternatives to bring to the public for discussion" said Craigie, adding that the discussion at the meeting was upbeat but very realistic. "It is pretty clear that we are going need community support to make this happen. We intend to poll community members for their opinion of the alternatives before the commissioner's vote on a resolution. We should have more details by the end of next week and then we really need to get the word out. We need people to comment on the options. This hospital belongs to the people of Garfield County; ultimately they will make the decision. We just want to be very clear about the options." The commissioners will meet again in special session Thursday April 15 at Noon to review and discuss the options before presenting them to the community.

On a related note; the district is moving ahead with the emergency replacement of the Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system in the Districts' Long term care building. Three vendors were invited to submit bids for the project by Tuesday's deadline and contractor Apollo Sheet Metal of Kennewick was determined to be the most qualified low bidder. The replacement is on a fast track in order to beat the spring and summer heat. The complete installation will cost the district close to \$155,000. The system specified for the facility was chosen, in part, to accommodate alternative uses of the long term care facility should this figure into the future plans of the district.

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