

Health district hearing will continue in January

By Donna Schmidt
Boardman Enterprise

Twelve years ago, when Bob Mahoney's three year old son was accidentally run over by a tractor, the child was in dire need of lifesaving medical treatment. His young son had a crushed pelvis, a broken arm, a fractured skull, and was bleeding profusely.

After administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation he rushed his child to the hospital-Pioneer Memorial Hospital. Today,

Mahoney's son is playing basketball. Mahoney cited the Heppner facility as one of the finest facilities a father could have asked for.

The long time south county resident shared that memory with more than one hundred people gathered at Riverside High School to hear testimony on the formation of separate medical districts at a December 9 public hearing.

Mahoney asked the hearings panel, Judge-elect Louis Carlson and Morrow County Commissioners Irv

Rauch and G.W. "Jerry" Peck not to divide the county on health care issues.

"The county needs to pull together on many issues; including schools and health care. We need to pull together and make our tax dollars work," he said.

But some north end residents and those who deliver health care and emergency medical services have lost confidence in county unity. Countywide tax dollars are not working, they say, at least not in the

north end. In fact, memories such as Mahoney's have become a grave reality in the north end with increased growth and development.

Cheryl Ammons, representing the Boardman ambulance, said that over 50 percent of the ambulance's runs involve serious trauma. Ammons said the ambulance no longer wants to be controlled by county and hospital budgets. "We want to be responsible for our own health care," she stated.

Dean Mason, Columbia River EMTs, pointed out that a response team for hazardous materials, chemicals, and radiation is needed in north Morrow County. "The deficiency has been in existence for several years and keeps growing," he said.

Mason added that capabilities for water rescue do not exist in the north end, that the ambulance is nine years old and vehicle replacement needs to be looked into.

"Sometimes that's the last ditch between them (patients) and dying—that nine year-old vehicle," he stressed.

Mason told the panel the County Court cannot stall the issues because the needs are immediate. "If you put it off you'll only compound needs," he concluded.

Port Commissioner Larry Lindsay voiced his concerns about harsh feel-

ings dividing the county and cautioned against more fragmentation.

Lindsay called for better utilization of current resources instead of changing the whole system. He said Morrow County would probably lose potential business and industrial clients if it could not assure stability in the schools and in the deliverance of health care.

Larry Mills and Marcia Anderson, both representing Heppner agencies asked for a recess of the hearing to allow time for the special committee appointed by the Morrow County Court to review the situation.

Heppner Mayor Cara Costa expressed support for a countywide district on behalf of Heppner City Council.

Don Eppenhach, Irrigon mayor and vice-chairman of the North Morrow Medical Board said the campaign supporting separate medical districts was launched because north end needs were not being met. The North Morrow Medical Board has been working toward that end for 10 years. "It has almost become a political football," he said.

Eppenhach reiterated that under the present system the north end of the county is unable to meet the demand for medical care it is faced with. Irrigon receives little health care services and uses Umatilla city services for emergency care while paying taxes for Morrow County

health care budgets. Irrigon also pays the city of Umatilla for its services.

Steven Rowe, of Boardman, also pointed out the Irrigon area has remained virtually untouched by county health dollars. "The EMTs and the medical center need to be commended for the care they deliver with the resources they have. Two districts would allow each system to provide for its own needs."

Dr. Steven Zielinski emphasized that Boardman is not a primary or a secondary service area of Pioneer Memorial Hospital and people in the north are paying for services in south county they don't use. Dr. Zielinski strongly encouraged the County Court not to succumb to pressures to prolong the hearing. He also encouraged members of the appointed committee to spend some time with health care personnel in the field.

"I realize you are under pressures," Zielinski said, "but our health care needs will not go away. For some of us, justice delayed is justice denied."

"We do not envy your positions, but ask you to carry out your duties."

With a conclusion of testimony and a brief period for questioning the hearing was continued until January.

Further discussions are expected to resume January 6 at Riverside High School.



Commissioner (left) Irv Rauch, Hearings officer Louis Carlson, and Commissioner Jerry Peck listened to testimony Dec. 9.

Need for levy "more dire" says administration

The school district's need for a \$36,736 serial levy is even greater than expected, Assistant Superintendent Chuck Starr told the Morrow County School Board Monday night. A January 13 election will decide the fate of a supplemental serial levy. The district will cut programs totaling the levy amount at the semester break if the levy is defeated.

A \$5,140,643 one-year operating levy was approved by county voters September 16.

"We're looking at less revenue than we expected because of financial shortfall and a lack of interest income," Starr said. "The need for the levy is more dire as days go by."

The district's two accredited high schools (Heppner High School and Riverside High School in Boardman) be instructed to reinstate some of the programs scheduled to be cut in order to maintain accreditation, Starr said. Schools do not have to be accredited to meet state standards, he said.

The board approved passing the proposed transportation budget to the budget committee for consideration in preparing next year's budget. Jim Bier, chairman of the transportation committee, explained the committee's recommendation for purchasing the three buses and two pickups which had been scheduled this year and were cut from the budget when the district had problems getting a levy approved. The district will research purchase of used buses and a lease purchase arrangement before the board is asked to make a decision on acquisition of buses for next year.

Bill Kuhn approached the board as a representative of the Heppner

Chamber of Commerce with an offer to help promote the serial levy and with a request that a member of the board work with the Chamber's committee to answer questions and inform them about the levy so that they can answer questions people will ask them.

In other business, the board appointed Bill Sharkey, Boardman, and Ken Turner, Heppner, to the transportation committee.

It heard that Irrigon schools will be required to hook up to the new Irrigon sewer system in October or November of next year.

It heard that the district's insurance premium is expected to increase 15% in the general liability area, 20-30% in the vehicle area, with perhaps no increase in the fidelity coverage. An expected 12.4% increase is expected in the premium for the board's errors and omissions policy. The policy's liability limit will also decrease from \$2 to \$1 million.

It appointed Steve Wagenblast of Lexington to the Budget Committee, reinstated Dean Robinson as a member of the Heppner-Lexington Advisory Committee.

It heard a suggestion from Marv Padberg, lone, that board members who vote against a motion state their reasons for voting "no".

Carolers

The Brass Carolers will be in concert again Saturday, Dec. 20 at 3 p.m. at the Christmas tree in downtown Heppner.

They will accept donations of money, canned goods, and toys for the Heppner Neighborhood Center Christmas baskets.

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