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MCHD may expand Boardman, Irrigon med facilities

Residents of Boardman and Irrigon may soon see expanded health care services in their communities. At its recent strategic planning session, the Morrow County Health District Board discussed plans to build new facilities for these communities in the coming year. Members proposed building a 9,954 square foot medical center in Boardman and a 2,322 square foot medical clinic in Irrigon. "We're very interested in enhancing services for Boardman and Irrigon," said chairperson Cara Osmin. "We recognize their rapid growth and it is our goal to meet any resulting health care needs."

The Boardman facility would allow the district to house the community's medical and dental clinics under one roof while providing additional space for a new urgent care center. District administrator Kevin Erich said the urgent care center would provide residents with expanded hours of access to emergency services. He told the board that urgent care is a service Boardman citizens have

repeatedly requested over the last several years.

Other services discussed for the Boardman medical center were physical therapy and home health care. Laboratory and x-ray capabilities were also included in preliminary plans. According to Erich, the new center could even offer a conference room for public use. A future site for the center has not been identified. Erich said the district plans to work with the city to determine the best location.

The board also agreed to pursue construction of a medical clinic in Irrigon. Plans include three medical exam rooms and laboratory and x-ray facilities. Erich said the city of Irrigon has expressed a willingness to donate land for this project, contingent upon final plan approval. Two sites are presently under consideration.

"We see our efforts as a progressive move," said Erich, adding, "Forty years ago, local and federal funds were used to build a much-needed hospital in Heppner. With its sub-

stantial population growth, the north county now has similar pressing health needs and we are determined to meet them as well."

Erich stressed that the district is just beginning to plan for both projects and that no firm costs have been identified. He added, however, that construction costs for both buildings are estimated \$100 per square foot.

"Our tax base is not adequate to cover the costs of these projects. It covers operations only. To expedite construction and ensure that these projects do indeed become reality, the board plans to ask voters to approve a bond measure," Erich said. He added that he doesn't expect the measure to go to voters before the November ballot.

Board members agreed that they will need to determine how receptive Morrow County residents are to expansion plans before going further. Town hall meetings are being planned for February in each of the county's five incorporated communities to solicit necessary public input.

Employment Relations Board rules in favor of school board

The Employment Relations Board (ERB) of Oregon on Friday, Jan. 5 unanimously agreed that the Morrow County School District (MCS D) did not commit an unfair labor practice when it solicited bids and recognized Mid Columbia Transportation, Inc., as low bidder for contracting transportation before completing negotiations with the Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA). This decision reverses the decision of the Administrative Law judge brought forth in June 1995.

In its "Conclusions of Law", ERB states that "the district did not violate ORS 243.672(1)(e) when it solicited bids for student transportation services and selected a transportation contractor before completing bargaining with OSEA." With regard to OSEA's charge that the district was involved in "surface bargaining" rather than legitimate bargaining on this issue, ERB says, "...we fail to find any of the other relevant behaviors discussed in 'McKenzie' as indicators of surface bargaining. In fact, (Chuck) Starr (MCS D superintendent) did attempt to bargain over the only proposal relating to contracting out (sick leave payout)

submitted by OSEA representatives. He also continued to solicit other proposals from the union, but none were brought forth. Under these circumstances, this board cannot infer, from the totality of Starr's conduct, that the district bargained in bad faith."

ERB concludes that, "Because OSEA failed to carry its burden of proving that the district committed a 'per se' violation of ORS 243.672(1)(e) or that the district violated (1)(e) by engaging in surface bargaining, the complaint must be dismissed."

Starr said he was very pleased with ERB's decision, and said, "I hope that this decision will help put to rest the outstanding issues between OSEA and our school district and allow us to return to the positive relations we have had in the past."

For more information concerning this decision, contact Starr at (541) 989-8202.

Strategies to meet

The North Central Oregon Regional Strategy Board meeting will be held Thursday, Jan. 18, beginning at 10 a.m. at the Fossil Senior Center in Fossil.

Health District proposal greeted with disdain

By April Hilton-Sykes
(Editor's note: see related story this page.)

A proposal by the Morrow County Health District (MCHD) to build a medical center in Boardman and a medical clinic in Irrigon came under attack by Boardman residents at the MCHD regular meeting held Monday night, Jan. 8, in Irrigon.

MCHD, in a news release earlier that day, outlined a plan proposing a 9,954 square foot medical center in Boardman and a 2,322 square foot clinic in Irrigon. MCHD Chairperson Cara Osmin said that the district is "interested in enhancing services for Boardman and Irrigon. We recognize their rapid growth and it's our goal to meet any resulting health care needs."

The district plans to ask district voters to fund the clinics with a bond measure. No cost has been set for construction.

The Boardman center would bring medical and dental clinics, an urgent care center, physical therapy and home health facilities under one roof. There is currently a medical clinic in Boardman, which is owned by the district and operated by Dr. Robert Boss. That clinic had earlier been criticized as being inadequate for the community's medical needs.

The proposed Irrigon clinic would include three medical exam rooms and laboratory and x-ray facilities. There is currently no medical clinic or doctor's office in Irrigon.

Boardman pharmacist Ray Michael led the attack on the board and the proposal by reading several letters from Boardman residents concerning construction plans and Dr. Boss, who is in the midst of contract negotiations with the board.

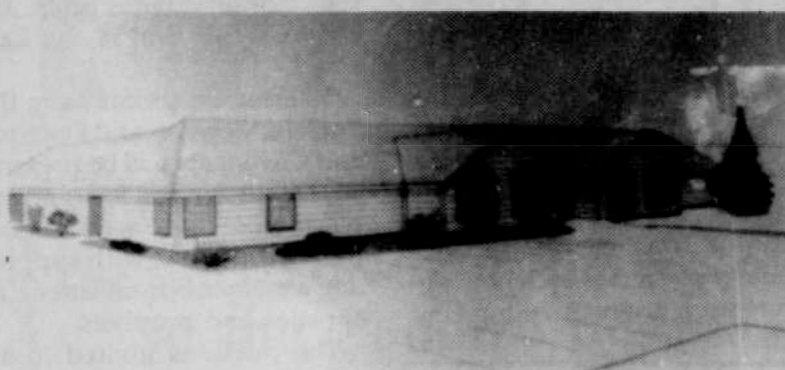
According to Michael, Dewey and Jeanne West of Boardman asked him to read a letter admonishing the board and MCHD Administrator Kevin Erich for their "cavalier" treatment of Dr. Boss. Michael also read a letter from John Prag, Boardman real estate consultant, lambasting the board for considering the proposed development. According to Michael, Prag asked what the district was thinking of, proposing a new clinic when a clinic already existed. Further, according to Michael, Prag said, "I had no idea it was the goal of the district to create an empire at the taxpayer's expense."

Tom Meyers of Boardman said he had "a problem" with the board for spending \$200,000 in salary for Dr. Ed Beretta and \$100,000 for Dr. Jeanne Beretta, when it won't pay Dr. Boss what he requests. He said the board's attitude was, "If the Berettas squeal we (the board) will do whatever it takes. If Dr. Boss squeals, we (the board) don't care."

Meyers' figures on the Berettas' salaries, however, are incorrect. Dr. Ed Beretta's base salary is \$120,000, with FICA, payroll taxes, medical dental insurance, malpractice insurance, workman's comp, life and disability insurance, state unemployment insurance and continuing education added on for a total package of \$146,000. Dr. Jeanne Beretta's base salary is \$80,000 with the above mentioned benefits added for a total package of \$100,000. Dr. Ernie Atkins' base salary is \$110,000, with benefits added for a total of \$135,000. The Berettas have lived in Heppner for eight years. This is the first year that their salaries were over \$100,000. The salary figures Dr. Boss is requesting and the board's counter offer have not



Proposed Irrigon medical clinic



Proposed Boardman medical center

been disclosed.

The contracts for the Berrettas, signed by the MCHD Board, specify that they provide emergency room coverage at Pioneer Memorial Hospital 29 weeks and 26 weekends out of the year, in addition to their clinic hours. Dr. Atkins provides emergency room coverage 23 weeks and 23 weekends.

Meyers also alleged that MCHD decided to put funding for the new facilities up for a vote because the board knew the bond issue would be defeated and then the health district could "wash their hands" of Boardman's health care problems. "You know as well as I do that the odds of passing it are about three to one," said Meyers. Meyers, Boardman City Council president, is also the husband of Sharon Meyers, a member of the Boardman Clinic staff.

Tony Carabba, physician's assistant at the Boardman Clinic, commented that he was "surprised at the anxiety and discomfort" that the plans have created and added, "I've never been anywhere that exhibited so much of the Hatfields and the McCoys," concerning Morrow County north-south politics.

Carabba said that there is a "big need" for expansion. He also said that if the board and Dr. Boss could not come to an agreement and Dr. Boss left the clinic, he didn't intend to stay either.

Clinic employees Kathy Cash and Debbie McDaniel also

spoke in favor of Dr. Boss.

Board Chair Cara Osmin said, "We (the board) want to try our very best to give the whole county what it needs."

Board member Jim Hankins, Boardman, replied, "I'm kind of frustrated because I hear all this innuendo about what we've offered. They (the Berrettas' salaries) are nowhere near \$200,000. I get very frustrated when I get this negative attitude from community leaders. They go on innuendo, misnomer. I almost agree that Boardman would vote it down."

Erich stressed that the plans for expansion were still in the early stages and that the board plans to have a series of town hall meetings to take community input. "If we go for a bond issue, we need to be sure were planning 20 years down the road," said Erich. "We don't know what your needs are 100 percent, but we want to know and we care."

Erich said that building a new hospital at Heppner was unrealistic, but added that considering the age of the hospital, which was built through a bond issue around 40 years ago, some improvements may have to be made to the hospital's physical plant.

Erich said that other possibilities for Boardman and Irrigon include an adult foster home with six to eight beds with adult day care available.

Elks Hoop Shoot contest, Jan. 14

The Elks Hoop Shoot contest, for kids eight to 13 years old will be held this Sunday, January 14, at Heppner High School.

Signup will be held from 3 to 3:30 p.m., with the contest getting underway at 3:30 p.m. There is no charge to compete.

Ages of children participating will be determined as of April 1996.

District competition will be held January 27 at Hermiston, with state competition scheduled in February at Keizer.

Local coordinator is Dave Gunderson.

Still no football field agreement

The Morrow County School Board and the Morrow County Fair Board have not yet agreed upon a lease for the school district's use of the foot-

ball field at the fairgrounds.

According to Shirley Landauer, business manager, the school board was informed that the lease will be up at the end of the school year.

Town and Country banquet Thursday

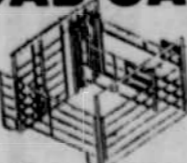
The Heppner Chamber of Commerce annual Town and Country Day is planned for this Thursday, January 11, at St. Patrick's Parish Hall in Heppner.

Meetings, which will be held much of the day, start at 10 a.m. The luncheon, which in-

cludes the presentation of Chamber awards, will be at noon. Social hour will begin at 6 p.m. and the banquet, featuring a prime rib dinner, entertainment and the presentation of man, woman, business and educator of the year, will get underway at 7 p.m.

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