

Health district seeks fix for budget woes

Persistent financial woes, including a \$117,000 loss for April and a \$456,000 loss for the year, are prompting Morrow County Health District CEO Victor Vander Does and the MCHD Board to examine the district's funding options. Vander Does and the board, at their regular meeting May 27 in Heppner, agreed that the district cannot afford to continue the extensive losses and consulted with Morrow County Assessor Greg Sweek to explore the possibility of putting a new tax before the voters to prop up the district.

Considering the current state-wide economic situation, board members were hesitant to take a new tax before the voters, especially in an election that would require a double majority. A simple majority is required only in general elections. Vander Does suggested a tax that would link MCHD with the Morrow County School District, and possibly provide health programs to the school district, but board members felt that citizen dissatisfaction with the school district could possibly hinder, rather than help the health district. Another option could be to float a levy to emergency medical services and link that to funding the clinics the district operates in Heppner and Irrigon, which, according to Vander Does, are the "big drains" to the district financially. (Pioneer Memorial Clinic, with a full-time and a part-time physician and a physician's assistant, saw 443 patients in April. Irrigon Clinic, with a physician's assistant and occasional physician, saw 171 patients in April.)

"It's not going to get any better," said Vander Does.

"I don't see anything coming out of the state. There's not going to be any safety net. Everything's got to be local."

Chief Financial Officer Nicole Mahoney stressed that if the board opts for a local tax, time is of the essence. "If you wait 'til (fiscal year) 2004, you won't get the money 'til 2005," she said. If a tax were passed in September of this year, the health district could collect in fiscal year 2003-04, if the budget included the levy monies and was adopted before June 30 of this year. If the tax was not approved until November, the district could not collect until fiscal year 2004-05. "We're not going to be able to make it if we don't (add a supplemental tax)," said Mahoney. "We don't have enough patients to generate enough revenue to continue operations. If we run out of money, we can't pay our vendors and can't pay our payroll. We have to decide what services you want and prioritize them. It needs to happen soon."

Vander Does said that he has asked for a five-percent cost reduction from hospital departments, but said that budget cuts alone are not sufficient to balance the budget and stressed that there is not much more to cut. The district anticipates a \$300,000 gift from an estate, which is expected to ease the district's financial problems for one year, depending in which fiscal year the gift arrives, but does not solve the district's long-term problems. Vander Does and the board agree that they cannot continue to supply all services they currently provide, but the hard job is to decide which services are to be cut.

"We're looking at reducing staff hours," said Vander Does. "The next cut won't be labor. It will be services." Vander Does estimated that the district needs another dollar per thousand in tax monies to survive.

Sweek presented the board information on tax rates throughout the district, including utilities, industrial taxes and enterprise zones and "compression", and provided some answers as to how these issues affect the health district's taxing capability. The board discussed the request by MCHD Board member Ed Glenn, Boardman, to have the city of Boardman be excluded from the Morrow County Health District, but took no action as the district is not yet sure whether that action would result in increased costs for the citizens of Boardman and whether it would help the district's bottom line. The board also discussed the possibility of the city of Boardman annexing the land on which the proposed Nascar race track is to be built, since that land currently is on the county tax rolls, but abuts city property. The city of Boardman previously gained substantial tax monies after annexing Port of Morrow industrial property. If the city of Boardman opts out of the district, Boardman taxpayers could have to pay 90 cents to \$1 per thousand to support their medical services, versus the 60-1/2 cents per thousand they currently pay.

In other business, the board agreed to an added eight percent incentive for Dr. Sam Datta, who is employed with the district in Heppner, which could increase his current salary of \$125,000 up to \$140,000. While the board was reluctant to increase costs for the district, they agreed on the importance of consistency in health care providers, Datta's good standing in the Heppner community and the value of financial returns he brings to the district, which Vander Does estimates at around \$277,000. While MCHD also pays \$140,000 to Dr. Robert Boss, who operates a private clinic in Boardman, the district receives no direct financial return, other than the "good will" of the Boardman community.

In related business, the board voted against reimbursing Dr. Boss for costs for two physician's assistants during a one-month transition period, where one PA was training to replace another who had announced his resignation. They agreed to pay \$5,841 to Dr. Boss to reimburse him for costs for one PA, rather than the \$10,214 he requested. The board was in agreement that Dr. Boss must abide by the terms of his new contract and provide required data to the district in order to receive monthly payments.

In other business, Vander Does announced the resignation of Willow Creek Terrace Assisted Living administrator Tonia Adams. Nancy Vander Does will serve as administrator until the facility is fully occupied. The assisted living center currently has seven residents, but has a potential for 16.

HEPPNER

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Stories of the Flood

Taken from the San Francisco Call, June 18, 1903 edition:

H.K. Bennett was just finished his day's work in his store when he says he felt that something fearful was going to happen. It had been raining and thundering for some time. He hastened home and told his wife they had better go up on high ground. She laughed at him, but he insisted so strongly that she at last accompanied him. They had hardly reached a safe limit when they saw a wall of water fully twenty-five feet high sweeping down the canyon. He rushed down below the First National bank building and aided many in getting out. He said the roar was fearful and the crash of buildings grinding together and pulverizing by the flood will long be remembered.

When the flood was at its height, the water was knee deep in the bank...

Oscar Heppner had one of the most thrilling experiences. He saw his house going and determined to save his family. Crawling over logs, trees and parts of broken houses he reached his home and succeeded in saving his family. He was badly bruised by his perilous trip.

George Conser, cashier of the First National bank, was down stairs in his house when the flood came. He woke his wife and rushed upstairs just as the house started. The water was up to his neck part of the time and by holding his wife up he was able to save her from drowning. They drifted down the canyon for about a mile and landed up against another house.

Mr. Conser kicked the window out and succeeded in climbing onto the roof and escaping.

N.H. Galatt who lives nearly ten miles south started to aid the sufferers as soon as he heard of the disaster. He found that the water spout had destroyed property and lives for about twelve miles southward. Along the road the scene was terrible. In places the roadway was washed out six feet deep and other places rocks and drift was piled up equally as high. Destruction of property is fearful. Farms are washed out, gardens destroyed and every house near the creek was brought down with the flood.

Souvenir flood edition goes on sale



Bert Houweling (left), owner of Central Market, and David Sykes, publisher of the Heppner Gazette-Times, display the souvenir front page of the 1903 Heppner Gazette flood edition that is now on sale at stores throughout Heppner.

The reprinted front page tells of the story of the devastating flood and gives a partial list of the known dead at that time.

The page will sell for \$5 and is available at Central Market, Murray Drugs, Gardner's Men's Wear, Peterson's Jewelers, Heppner Gazette-Times and Wheatland Insurance.

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the pages will go to the commemoration committee which is putting on the 100-year centennial celebration of the flood.

Vandals hit grange, church auction items

Sometime last week vandals entered the Lone Grange hall and did thousands of dollars in damage to not only the hall but to the auction items stored



About \$1,000 of damage was done to church auction items

there waiting for this Saturday's annual Lone United Church of Christ's auction.

The damage was discovered Saturday morning when volunteers showed up to begin working on preparing for the auction.

Damage was estimated at around \$3,000 - \$2,000 to the building and \$1,000 to auction items.

The vandals apparently entered the building through a downstairs door after breaking a window.

The vandals proceeded to open cans of food and throw the contents around the room. They also took knives and slit open several couches located downstairs.

Pornographic graffiti was scrawled on the walls as well as the words, "Bitch we got u back, ha ha" written on one of the counters.

Police said Tuesday they had not apprehended anyone for the crime, however Saturday sheriff's deputies Loren Dieter and Brian Rietmann were taking fingerprints from the knives and other objects.

A fine powder was spread over the floor and furniture

downstairs where fire extinguishers had been set off.

Up stairs was trashed heavily as the vandals tipped over tables laden with auction items and broke glass and other items.

The restrooms were also trashed and the toilets plugged.

By Saturday afternoon a crew of 20 volunteers had torn up the old carpet and hauled off several of the destroyed couches. By Sunday morning new carpet had been purchased and volunteers were installing it.

The Rev Paul Clay of the Lone United Church of Christ said the auction is ready to go.

"We are expecting a great day Saturday with lots of people and good food and lots of fun," he said.

Rev. Clay also said there would be another work party scheduled for Friday at 9 a.m. and anyone who would like to help is welcome.

Church member Jean Jepsen, who was the first to discover the vandalism, said "We will be ready to go. I is something that slows you down, but doesn't stop you."



Sheriff deputies investigate the crime scene

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