

Town Council voices support for Holy Cross Hospital

By Matthew van Buren

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The Taos Town Council unanimously passed a resolution Dec. 11 in support of Holy Cross Hospital and critical of the Taos County Commission.

Holy Cross representatives went before the county commission Oct. 2 to request a special tax election be authorized, citing a projected \$6 million annual shortfall — close to 10 percent of the hospital's yearly budget. The hospital's board was seeking a 1.6 mill levy, or a tax of \$1.60 per \$1,000 of taxable property value. Board members told the commission the local funds could have been matched 3.4-to-1 by federal sources.

However, the county commission voted unanimously against authorizing the tax election, as allowed by the Hospital Funding Act.

The town resolution cites the county commission's Oct. 2 vote, noting that as a result "the hospital may have to make some very significant reductions in health care services."

"The action taken by the county commission was illadvised, will hurt those citizens who can least afford the cost of health care, and will result in our citizens having to travel a great distance to other hospitals for their health care," the resolution states. "The request by Holy Cross Hospital would have resulted in a federal match of \$3.4 million for every \$1 million that we would raise locally because of our Sole Community Provider designation. This is a significant loss of revenue to our hospital, especially at a time when funding for our indigent population has been reduced by over \$6 million in the past three years."

The resolution calls for the state Legislature and Congress to "see what measures can be taken to seek additional funding under the Sole Community Provider Act."

According to the resolution, the council "would like to go on record in full support of Holy Cross Hospital and the valuable services that it provides to all the citizens of Taos County."

Holy Cross board members Ron Burnham and Gus Còrdova, also a former manager of the town of Taos, spoke to the council before the vote on the resolution. Burnham said the hospital "has a tremendous impact on the local economy" and that the board is "absolutely committed" to providing medical services to the Taos community.

Burnham said the hospital currently provides about \$10 million in uncompensated annual care and that funding has dwindled in recent years. He said the hospital has had to do some "painful belt-tightening" as a result. He said Holy Cross is anticipating a "lean" fiscal year and has been looking at other funding sources after the county commission's Oct. 2 vote.

Còrdova said there is no “special formula” for future funding. “It’s going to be a combination of many things,” he said.

Còrdova told the council he hopes to go back to the county commission in January, when new members have been sworn in, to renew the request for a special tax election.

Mayor Darren Còrdova said he would use a property tax as a “last resort,” as he feels tourists should also pay a share. He said a property tax “in conjunction with” a gross-receipts tax would better allow Taos to diversify its economic base and bolster a major economic driver.

Councilor Fred Peralta said going back before the county commission in January should be considered, as should other sources. “I think that we should be looking at every possibility,” he said.

The resolution also calls for a meeting between the council and the Holy Cross board; a hospital board presentation regarding Holy Cross’ “plans and finances” was scheduled Wednesday evening (Dec. 19).