

## **Taos Town Council, Holy Cross board examine funding options**

**By Matthew van Buren**

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The Taos Town Council reiterated its support for Holy Cross Hospital at a meeting Dec. 19.

The hospital is experiencing a financial shortfall and requested in October a property tax election, though the Taos County Commission voted against it.

The Dec. 19 meeting, held at Holy Cross, followed a unanimous vote by the Town Council Dec. 11 to pass a resolution voicing the town's support for the hospital and criticizing the County Commission.

Mayor Darren Córdova spoke to the importance of Holy Cross to the Taos community and said the meeting was held so town leaders "can better understand the financial needs of the hospital."

"This is a major component of what our community needs," he said.

Córdova said the hospital is a significant employer and driver of economic development in the area. He said the town wants to be an "ally of the hospital" and that multiple funding options should be explored. He said a gross receipts tax to benefit the hospital may be preferable to a property tax.

"That way everybody pays for it," he said. "In this economic environment, passing a property tax is going to be very tough."

Holy Cross board chair Ron Burnham addressed the council, saying the community shouldn't worry the hospital will close its doors but that whichever funding strategy is ultimately decided on should be pursued with a "sense of urgency."

Burnham said the board has been working with state Sen. Carlos Cisneros, D-Questa, and state Rep. Roberto "Bobby" Gonzales, D-Taos, on legislation that could be voted on during the next legislative session but that "there are no assurances that that tree is going to bear fruit."

"Hope springs eternal," Burnham said.

He said both short- and long-term funding options are being examined.

Burnham also said the board also plans to approach the County Commission again early next year, after new commissioners Tom Blankenhorn and Gabe Romero take their seats.

Holy Cross CEO Peter Hofstetter said hospital leaders were “pretty discouraged” by the commission’s vote and that Holy Cross is “facing some fairly significant challenges” after having cut nearly \$7 million from its budget over the last two years. He said the board would like to see the county commit up to \$2 million from its indigent fund this fiscal year.

Hofstetter said the hospital provides nearly \$10 million in uncompensated care each year and that the board is seeking a source of funding that would be devoted exclusively to Holy Cross.

He said board members are cautiously optimistic about work being done by the State Legislature.

There was also talk at the Dec. 19 meeting about approaching the Los Alamos National Laboratories and Chevron Mining for support.

Còrdova said he hopes to see continuous dialogue between the board and town manager Oscar Rodriguez about how best to collaborate and lobby state leaders for support.