



THE TAOS NEWS

In 2007 Voted Best Weekly Newspaper in the U.S. by the National Newspaper Assoc.

Union calls for task force to probe Holy Cross finances

By Andrew Oxford

The Taos News, 10/10/201

Town councilors continued discussion Tuesday (Oct. 8) of forming a task force with the county and other stakeholders to examine the management and structure of Holy Cross Hospital.

With hospital staff calling for the committee to probe the organization's finances and the town manager cautioning against an adversarial stance, it was unclear what influence such a committee could have on the nonprofit's governance.

Initially proposed during a joint meeting of the town and county governments Sept. 24, Mayor Darren Córdova said the committee would "assist the hospital in identifying how we can help" after a recent round of layoffs and other cuts at the hospital.

With members appointed by both governments, the body would provide a forum for patients, staff and local residents to give input as well as ideas regarding the future of Holy Cross, town manager Oscar Rodriguez said.

The committee would also provide local governments with recommendations regarding alternatives to the hospital's strategic plan announced Sept. 9 that included layoffs and a reduction in patient beds.

Leaders of the union representing health care workers at Holy Cross offered their own ideas about forming such a committee.

A proposal drafted by the union and issued to councilors called for the task force to closely review the hospital's finances and develop a plan for budgets and financing.

"It is my understanding the union has the right to look at the finances of the hospital and they are moving to do that," Bruce Weatherbee, of District 1199, told councilors.

The union's proposal also called for the task force to review the legal relationship between Holy Cross, the town and county as well as the hospital's financial obligations to local taxpayers.

The committee should also explore options for changing the nonprofit hospital's bylaws, according to the union's proposal, and examine "alternative structures" such as the creation of a county or municipal facility.

Alluding to the hospital's private management firm as well as suggestions the hospital reduce beds and close its intensive care unit to attain critical access status, nurse and union leader Francis Trujillo argued that the subcommittee should rethink the hospital's strategic plan.

“Is Quorum the right thing for Taos? Is critical access the right thing for Taos?” Trujillo asked councilors.

Though the town did not approve any formal structure for the committee, the union proposed the task force be composed of 15 members including the mayor, a town council member, the chair of the county commission, a county commissioner, the chair of the hospital’s board, a board member, three union members, three doctors and three members of the general public.

Some councilors expressed support for the union’s call to address structural issues at Holy Cross but Rodriguez suggested the task force not overstep the role of the hospital’s board.

“There is a board of directors there now. The idea is not to duplicate,” the town manager said.

Council member Rudy Abeyta suggested, however, that the board was not exercising adequate oversight and relinquished too much control to the hospital’s CEO.

“I’ve gone to a board meeting and we have some very reputable people on that board but their level of involvement may not be what it needs to be,” Abeyta said. “The CEO has the power.”

Hospital officials told *The Taos News* they would actively participate in such a task force.

“We would like to have an opportunity to present our whole picture,” marketing and public relations manager Maria Meadowcroft stated in an email Wednesday (Oct. 9). “Many times the stories told and then publicized tell only one side of the situation and we need to change that.”