



Town council OKs plan for hospital committee

By Andrew Oxford

The Taos News, 10/24/2013

A committee to include representatives of local governments, the medical community, hospital staff and the general public will offer a series of recommendations regarding the future of Holy Cross Hospital by the end of January, according to a plan unanimously approved by the Taos town council Tuesday (Oct. 22).

Municipal officials have discussed creating a joint task force with the county and others to examine the community's relationship with the local health care provider after administrators there announced a round of layoffs in September.

The union representing health workers at Holy Cross presented a framework for the committee's structure at a council meeting Oct. 8.

Union leaders called for a permanent joint committee to probe the hospital's finances, structure and legal obligations to local governments.

Town manager Oscar Rodriguez told councilors the proposal he presented Tuesday was based on the union's input as well as consultations with hospital CEO Peter Hofstetter and county manager Stephen Archuleta. "I have tried to make it as simple as possible," Rodriguez said.

According to the town's plan, the 15-member committee would consist of two representatives and one alternate from the town council, the county board of commissioners, the hospital board, the union and the intergovernmental committee. Two doctors from the hospital, a doctor from the broader medical community and three community members with knowledge of health care would also be included.

The group would begin its work with a public hearing to gather input regarding the hospital from local residents, according to the plan approved Tuesday.

The committee would subsequently consult with financial and medical industry experts on the hospital's economic state, the business climate facing hospitals such as Holy Cross and the needs of the local community.

Holy Cross executives would also provide input regarding business planning, financing and future needs, the plan stated.

By Jan. 31, the committee would then provide recommendations for improving public communication and transparency between Holy Cross and local residents. The committee would also recommend options for local government support, improving local community engagement and whether the ad hoc committee should continue its work.

Union organizer Bruce Weatherbee said the committee would offer parity among the various hospital's various stakeholders.

"I know people think of the union and the administration as always being adversarial," he told the council. "That's not the intent here."

"The idea is to have a cross section," Weatherbee added. "We think you guys put together a very good thing here."

In an email to *The Taos News* Wednesday (Oct. 23), Hofstetter stated hospital administrators are glad to participate and suggested the committee presented an opportunity for more effective communication regarding the issues facing Holy Cross.

"There are lots of things to talk about and share as the community is not getting the whole picture at the present time," he stated.

Rodriguez said the public would be invited to nominate doctors and other community members to serve on the committee. Nominees would be named at the council's next meeting Oct. 5, he said.