



THE TAOS NEWS

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Editorial

Note to hospital board: Discussion is healthy

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The future of Holy Cross Hospital is in jeopardy, if financial data is any indication. Taos Health Systems, a nonprofit organization that runs the hospital, has frighteningly little cash in the bank and a long list of expensive repairs as well as equipment that is needed sooner rather than later. Taxpayers may even be asked to chip in by paying higher property taxes.

But if there are any problems at the hospital, you wouldn't guess it from attending a Taos Health Systems board meeting.

Sure, presentations on the hospital's financial state are clear enough. And we don't doubt the board is aware of this community institution's precarious situation.

But rarely are there any questions in open meeting.

Split votes are rarer still.

Sure, Taos Health Systems is a private not-for-profit organization and its board members are volunteers.

The board is set up to represent the community, though. Some seats are reserved for residents of certain geographic areas, and the hospital has always counted on community members for financial support.

So we expect the decisions affecting this important community resource to be closely scrutinized and debated.

A community task force was established in late 2013 to do exactly that. Its monthly meetings are often consumed by intense debate and cantankerous conversation.

But the meetings are also informative. It is community engagement at its best. Its power is limited, though.

The time has long since passed for the board to ask similarly tough questions. Is the hospital getting a good deal from the management company it has contracted? Are legislators doing enough to support small hospitals in rural areas?

We definitely need a more lively discussion among board members, before the hospital asks taxpayers for more money.

When agenda items are simply presented and seemingly rubber-stamped, we wonder who is in charge. Only on occasion does a board member dissent from the majority.

Given the financial struggle this hospital faces, we need someone in charge.

In the last year, three new people have been appointed to the board who have never served on it before and agendas are now posted online. We are eager to hear their perspectives.

Second opinions are important in medicine. They are also important for a community hoping its hospital can remain open.

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