



Hospital board passes resolution on tax dollars

By Andrew Oxford

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Any money raised through a proposed property tax to support Holy Cross Hospital would only be used for capital equipment or building maintenance, not for operations or salaries, according to a resolution passed by its board of directors last week (Dec. 9).

The resolution was approved days after the Taos County Board of Commissioners called a special election for March 8 with just one question on the ballot: whether to bump up property taxes to help fund the hospital.

Such a tax has been discussed by local leaders and hospital administrators on and off several years as Taos Health Systems, the nonprofit operating Holy Cross Hospital, struggled financially.

The resolution passed at the nonprofit's board meeting Dec. 9 clarifies where money from the tax will flow.

The question before voters would allow the funds to be used for "the operation and maintenance of Holy Cross Hospital."

Some administrators and board members raised concerns, however, that the term "operations" could be construed as allowing the money to be used to pay staff.

Compensation needs to be improved for Taos Health Systems to remain competitive, according to administrators. But Taos Health Systems CEO Bill Patten has emphasized improving pay is not contingent on voters approving a tax for the hospital.

"The board decided to use the money for capital equipment and building maintenance within the context that employee compensation issues would have to be addressed," he said Tuesday (Dec. 15).

Patten has argued devoting the money to specific equipment and maintenance needs will be more transparent and palatable politically.

The hospital's leadership has been criticized in recent years amid cuts with some observers likening the proposed property tax to a bailout.

But the hospital building is owned by Taos County.

Repairs and equipment upgrades mulled by hospital administrators total between \$10 and \$12 million.

Taos Health Systems has lost millions of dollars in recent years, which administrators argue has forced them to put off such upgrades.

Receiving tax dollars to cover at least some of the cost from such expenses would allow the hospital to improve compensation with other funds, Patten said.