

Hospital financing talks stall

(KNZA)--Progress on helping the Hiawatha Community Hospital with its current financial crisis has stalled until a joint city/county advisory committee working on solutions gets additional responses to recommendations it made to the hospital board.

That was determined following a February 22 meeting of the committee formed in January to explore options for assisting the hospital financially.

Newly appointed hospital CEO John Broberg told the committee the hospital board is requesting \$5 million in financial assistance.

Being looked at is a county-wide half-cent sales tax to provide funding to pay off bonds that would be issued. The sales tax would require voter approval.

Broberg said the hospital will not survive without tax support in light of challenges it faces with Medicare repayments and reductions in reimbursements.

He reviewed the hospital board's responses to a list of recommendations made at the committee's February 11 meeting, with committee members voicing their dissatisfaction about some of the responses.

Most significantly, was the recommendation that the hospital retain a healthcare management and consulting firm to assist in regaining financial stability--a firm similar to an entity like Great Plains Alliance.

Committee member, Brown County Attorney Kevin Hill, said the committee needed to be assured that moving forward a management system was in place " to have another pair of eyes" on the hospital finances and management, so a situation such as the current financial crisis didn't occur again.

In its response, the hospital board noted Broberg's more than 40 years of experience in the health care industry and that they had retained a financial services company in October to assist with the finance and revenue cycle operations of the hospital.

Another recommendation was that the hospital considers opening and staffing an urgent care facility and clinic in Horton, should the Horton hospital close. In its response, the hospital board said they were "open to having discussions" on the matter.

Committee members said they want to see more of a commitment from the

hospital, assurance that if the Horton hospital fails, the Hiawatha hospital will step in.

Committee member, Horton City Administrator and Police Chief John Calhoon, said he didn't believe voters in the southern end of Brown County will support a sales tax increase without more of a commitment to helping Horton.

Calhoon also said he thinks the \$5 million being requested is not sufficient if Horton is included in the plan.

The hospital board will provide additional responses to the concerns raised by the committee and another meeting will be held after that happens. That meeting has been set for Monday, March 4 at 12 noon at the Hiawatha City Hall.

Many Signals Communications