

# Mark Reed

## OKS Oakhurst

Board concerned  
by Swickerath's  
contact info

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*Vidette Reporter*

ELMA — Commissioners of Public Hospital District No. 1 gave Mark Reed CEO Renée Dunham the nod March 25 to negotiate the purchase of the Oakhurst site in Elma for the district's new hospital.

They also authorized her to make the final decision on whether the district will purchase the site from Grays Harbor County, or not.



New district commissioner Dean Schwickerath asked why Dunham alone would be making that decision.

Schwickerath and his fellow commissioners, Louie Figueroa, Brent Meldrum, Drew Hooper and Amy Thomason, have been elected and tasked with providing "for equipment and facilities consistent with present and future community needs for patients entrusted to the hospital," the district's bylaws say.

The CEO, according to the by-laws, is to "furnish periodic recommendations to the board with respect to the acquisition, development and extension of desirable health care facilities, equipment and services."

Besides authorizing Dunham to negotiate a purchase agreement of the 22-acre site, a resolution the commissioners passed gives her the authority "at her discretion to determine whether it is in the best interest of the district to proceed with the purchase and close the transaction or terminate the agreement."

Moreover, "all actions previously taken in furtherance of the purposes of this resolution are ratified and confirmed," it concludes.

The resolution says the price must not be more than the \$1 million the county has already offered to sell the property for, and, if the site is purchased on an installment basis, the installment period must not be more than 40 years, with the interest rate on

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the installments not more than 5 percent.

Hooper said since those conditions are in the resolution, Dunham's just following "the parameters" set by the commissioners. And, he said, she's been operating "a multi-million-dollar facility, making huge decisions that have large financial impact on a regular basis. At the very least, I think that she has the ability and capacity, with the assistance of those who will be available to her, to make negotiations on a piece of property."

If there were a "time crunch," Schwickerath said, he could understand passing the resolution, which makes Dunham the decision-maker. "But," Schwickerath said, "I don't see anything precluding us to allow Renee to go out and make the negotiations and come back and say, 'Here's the best deal I got. Now would you approve that?' (That would bring back to) an elective board their responsibility for approving that," he said.

"It's very, very likely I will do that," Dunham said.

If Dunham "elects to proceed with the purchase," the resolution says, she and the "proper district officials are authorized and directed to do all other things and execute and deliver all documents... necessary and reasonable to consummate the

transaction promptly and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the agreement."

The "proper district officials" are not named, but it's likely Mark Reed chief financial officer, Ron Hutscher, and Jeff Fivecoat of Red Capital Group of Columbus, Ohio, who is facilitating the district's applying for a U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development loan, would be those persons, Dunham said.

**Commissioner feels rushed**

There was also discussion about whether the district was rushing into building a new hospital. "I'm getting that rushed feeling in our recent board meetings, instead of the slow and methodical research an important project like this requires," Schwickerath said in a guest column in *The Vidette* the day of the meeting.



But in light of the county's high unemployment rate, "is it not (more) fiscally responsible to acquire a new hospital at a low fixed-interest rate that we can afford as determined by a feasibility study by a credible third-party resource than to ask for additional tax dollars from the community, which already

feels overtaxed and underemployed?" Hooper asked.

Schwickerath said he's concerned about "the concept that the state, the feds have a lot of money, and we should all take advantage of that, the stimulus money." From his perspective, Schwickerath said, "we are essentially saddling our debts to our children and their children."

But "we need to take responsibility for our own future and our own community," Schwickerath said. "So I understand the concept that we failed twice to build a hospital, and that's been disappointing. But at the same time, I also am concerned when we reach out to the federal government and essentially we are asking people across Montana, Florida and everybody else to pay for what we want to do here, rather than stand on our own two feet and try to afford that." Ultimately, though, Schwickerath joined the other commissioners in passing the resolution.

It's estimated the new hospital will cost between \$15 million and \$25 million. The district is hoping to have the loan application ready for the USDA by early July to meet a federal deadline in September before the current round of stimulus funding ends.

**E-mail address issue**

Hooper also told Schwickerath an e-mail address he had created for responses to his

newspaper column was "inappropriate." The address "sounds like a representation of the hospital, as opposed to a personal representation," Hooper said.

As a new commissioner without an official e-mail address, Schwickerath said Tuesday, he created it so others could "communicate back to the writer." He said no one had "ever offered me" an official e-mail address, "although (at the meeting) Renee said you can use one of ours. That's the first I ever (heard) of it."

"You are able to act as a private citizen," Dunham told Schwickerath at the meeting. "But when it comes to the actions of the board, it becomes public."

"The board should agree on communication policies and how the board communicates to the public," Dunham said. "And we have asked that all the commissioners have *markreed.org* e-mail addresses and use those," she said. "We have been cautioned by our attorney today if e-mail addresses that seem to represent the interest of the board are created, then those become subject to public disclosure."

If a public record request was made but not "met," the commissioners "could be held liable for that," Dunham said.

Schwickerath said he'd be "interested in pursuing that and correcting my action" if it's a problem. But "I don't believe that's correct."