

NEWS & FROM THE FRONT

McCleary threatens to pull out Mayor posits exit from hospital district

By TOMMI HALVORSEN GATLIN
Vidette Reporter

MCCLEARY — To answer questions anyone might have about the new hospital being planned in Elma, Mark Reed CEO Renée Dunham attended the April 28 McCleary City Council meeting.

Mayor Gary Dent had some questions, and a comment or two. Because the public hospital district is preparing to build the new facility on the former Oakhurst Sanatorium site in Elma — instead of McCleary, where it's been since being built in 1956 — there's a good bit of "discontent" in his town, Dent told Dunham.

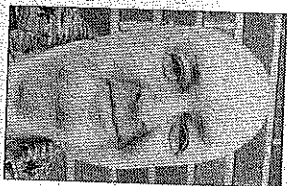
And "we've examined the process of having the City of McCleary pull out of the hospital district," he added.

State law outlines the multi-step process in which territory within a public hospital district may be withdrawn "in the same manner provided by law for withdrawal of territory from water-sewer districts" and would involve a hearing before the district's board of commissioners and possibly the "county legislative authority" and, as a last resort, a special election, though it isn't clear whether it would be a district-wide vote or just among the area petitioning for withdrawal.

In the event the petition for withdrawal reaches both boards of commissioners, both would be required to rule on whether the withdrawal would "be of benefit to such territory" and if it would be "conducive to the general welfare of the balance of the district." If the county commissioners answer either in the negative or if their answers are different from those of the hospital district commissioners, the petition for withdrawal would be "deemed denied," the law says, which would trigger a special election.

Dent also asked several times whether district taxpayers would be responsible if, after the hospital is built for somewhere around \$20 million, the money is not there from its operating costs to repay the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Develop-

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McCleary Mayor Gary Dent

ment loan.

Dunham said the "plan is to submit to the USDA for about 90 percent direct funding from them in the form of revenue bonds guaranteed by the USDA. So we're not using tax dollars as guarantee for that loan."

A "very in-depth analysis" was also being done to make "very, very sure that this will work before we go into it," Dunham said. But if "something crazy was to happen" and the hospital defaulted, "the liability for that would be held with the USDA, not the taxpayers," she said.

"Can you give us anything in writing to that extent?" the mayor asked. "When the documents are prepared with the USDA, we'd be happy to share those with you," Dunham said. She said hopes are to submit the application in July or August.

City Attorney Dan Glenn wanted to know how much the annual loan payment would be, even just a "rough extrapolation." But Dunham said she didn't have that information with her and she didn't want to "misquote it."

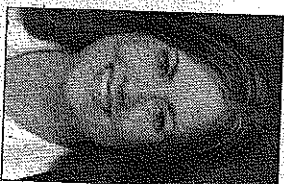
When Glenn said a little later that Dunham "must have some idea what the annual payment's going to be," she repeated that she didn't.

Moreover, Dunham said, "I have been very successful the last two years at making this hospital make money. And I'm a smart girl with a good business head. I'm not going to put that hospital in a position where it's not going to be successful."

In addition, Dunham said, no one questions that the current aging and cramped

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Mark Reed CEO Renée Dunham

current facility isn't even up to code or other standards and needs replacing. She said she's "trying to help the community understand it would be irresponsible at a time when there's monies available for stimulus to build jobs and build a hospital in our community to not take advantage" of the current low interest rates. Furthermore, she said, "it's the only time in Mark Reed's history that we could possibly do this" without taking it to the district's taxpayers.

"If the USDA approves the money, at the date they approve it, do the taxpayers of the city of McCleary then become underwriters of that loan, Dent asked again later.

"No," Dunham said.

"Again, I want to see it in writing," the mayor said.

"Again, I will share the documents as soon as they're available," Dunham said.

The possibility of having a new hospital has been "a long time coming," Dunham said. "This is our one shot to do it."

And, she added, "having a brand new facility in Elma is a heck of a lot better than no facility at all."

Group

By LEIF NESHEN
Vidette Editor

MONTESANO beats of the grass One Voice urged Bor County commission support building dams on the upper River rather than Corp of Engineers readily in the work.

"The plan on that won't even do a job of protecting Vander Sloep.

Worse, the levees raise floodwaters Porter, while d lower floodwaters by two feet, he said Lewis County, Chehalis, Central and Cosmopolis, Ha-Chehalis Commerce, the Chehalis Airport, Chehalis and Central Fire District Lewis County

Beacon

By LEIF NESHEN
Vidette Editor

MONTESANO

lack of progress on Park is a sore spot for man Pat Harrington he's tired of other prying to the front of the line ahead of the park

Riders of all-terrain are tearing up the people are dumping if the city continues may lose grant to develop the park, and will grow enough to work already done, h

"This is a huge Natural Resources Loren Hiner said. The city has no much mitigation for wetlands will cost and resources to do the j

Elma: Mayor, council disagree over intent of motion