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JCF looks to other rural hospitals for inspiration

By Christina Manuel, Staff Writer | October 28, 2021 | Reprinted with Permission

Looking at different hospital layouts took the spotlight during the John C. Fremont (JCF) Board of Directors discussion.

Coming together on Oct. 20 for their monthly meeting, pictures of hospitals in rural counties similar to Mariposa were shown to the directors and the watching public to get ideas for a future JCF hospital.

As Senate Bill 1953 is “looming on the horizon,” said Matthew Matthiessen, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the JCF Healthcare District, other hospitals are also “facing the same challenges we’re facing.”

The current JCF hospital, built in 1951, is not up to today’s seismic standards. The building needs to be upgraded to satisfy SB 1953 by 2030 or risks shutting down.

Matthiessen had taken a few days off to visit a couple of hospitals, gathering information and pictures to spark ideas and plans for the local hospital. As of the board’s last meeting date, there are three options when it comes to construction. Read the story here: bit.ly/3G1Oe1g.

First shown was Modoc Medical Center in Alturas. The town has a smaller population than Mariposa by a couple thousand people, Matthiessen said, and their nearest hospital is past the state line in Oregon.

The medical center was constructed in an empty field, with staff moving into the building in March. This center receives about 20 percent less visitation than JCF does, which averages about 450-500 visits a month. Modoc Medical Center has three treatment rooms with two trauma beds (one more than JCF has). Medical surgical capacity is capped at eight people.

“The construction process took them 15 months, so that was fast,” Matthiessen said. However, with design and planning, the entire process is close to three to four years in total.

The price tag for the new center was \$45 million, which is in line with the local health care district’s plans. Modoc Medical Center is funded by a property tax with no sunset date, which passed with 70 percent approval, and now generates about \$2 million a year. Their funding efforts began in 2010.

“One advantage for us,” began Matthiessen, “is the sales tax is that the cost can be shared ... by visitors. So the entire price tag isn’t on the backs or out of the pockets of people who live here.”

The second hospital shown at the director’s meeting was Mayers Memorial Hospital in Shasta County. The closest hospital is 70 miles away.

This hospital is not yet done satisfying SB 1953, but currently has three emergency department rooms with five beds, a trauma room with two beds and 16 medical surgical beds.

Construction costs for the building is at \$15 million so far and like Mariposa, had a citizen's group run the funding effort of a special assessment tax.

JCF hospital funding

The district is once again trying to gain funding for the upgrade with a 1 percent sales tax on the June 2022 ballot, which was adopted by the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors this week. The sales tax efforts have been run by the Citizens to Save the Hospital, which are now in the process of organizing into a campaign committee, according to Citizens to Save the Hospital co-chair, Suzette Prue.

“The fact of the matter is the citizens group has been working very hard and tirelessly on this and the first official step was satisfied yesterday,” Matthiessen said.

The local initiative was required to obtain 823 signatures, which they surpassed with 1,706.

Prue was pleased with the turnout at the supervisors meeting on Oct. 19, as Marilyn Saunders from the Mariposa County Economic Development Corporation; Shannon Gadd, director of Health and Human Services; and Mariposa County Sheriff Jeremy Briese all spoke in favor of supporting the initiative. Each supervisor also took a turn to express their support for having a hospital in town.

As the effort is a citizen's initiative, “it only needs 50 percent of the vote to pass,” Prue said.

Last November, Measure N, a 1 percent sales tax with no sunset date, only received 63 percent approval. Two-thirds majority, or 66 percent approval was needed to pass.

“So we are not at all concerned about this,” Prue said. It is the group's goal to reach 68 percent approval in the June 2022 election.

For information about the citizen's group, visit their website at www.savethehospital.org.

Note: Article continues with unrelated topics...

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