

Billings Clinic affiliation

HealthCare membership gets final say

By Stephen Matlow
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When the time is right, the Park County area's medical future will be squarely in the hands of the membership of Livingston HealthCare.

While an affiliation agreement has been reached with Billings Clinic, the formal contract will have to be approved by a two-thirds majority of Livingston HealthCare members present when a vote is held, according to HealthCare CEO Sam Pleshar.

The membership, often referred to as the association, is a body made up of dues-paying community members who control the governing documents of HealthCare, such as the bylaws, and also elect and direct the board of trustees, said HealthCare Board of Trustees President Michelle Becker Wednesday morning.

What the members will be voting on, Pleshar said, will be new bylaws and articles of incorporation that, if passed, will replace the current membership with one member — Billings Clinic.

What the Livingston area gets in return will be a \$37.5 million medical facility to be built on land just east of the Yellowstone River bridge at the KPRK radio station on land donated by Georgeann and Ted Watson.

It is expected the hospital will be financed with money raised through bonds by Billings Clinic along with the sale of current HealthCare assets and a fund-raising drive.

The poor bond market, with interest rates topping 8 percent, means the project will be put off until more inexpensive financing is available, said Pleshar.

"We aren't going to go forward with the current bond

market the way it is," he said. "We won't be holding a vote until the bond market looks better, hopefully by March."

It is very doubtful a vote will be held on affiliation when the members annual meeting is held Jan. 28, Pleshar said.

There are now 144 members of Livingston HealthCare, and a membership drive has been ongoing for several weeks, said HealthCare Marketing Director Sandi Marlowe.

HealthCare is also sending out renewal notices to all current members, she said.

Membership costs \$10 a year.

2008 memberships run out on Dec. 31, said Pleshar.

Anyone who has been a member for 60 days will be eligible to vote on the affiliation, said Pleshar.

The vote will be by paper ballot, and it will be impossible for anyone from HealthCare or Billings Clinic to know how someone voted, said Marlowe.

Approximately 40 percent of the members work for HealthCare, she said.

At one time, more than 700 people in the area were members, Pleshar speculated.

Some particulars of the affiliation are already being discussed during HealthCare staff meetings, but many details will not be available until the bonding procedure is complete, said Pleshar.

"We want the members to get the full picture, and with financing not complete, we cannot give them the full picture," he said.

The hospital has been a non-profit community hospital for years, with a membership in one form or another since the 1940s, said Pleshar.

"The changes made in the bylaws in the 1970s are basically still in place and have served us well," he said.



Livingston HealthCare