By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Members of the Chase County Hospital District (CCHD) will hold three informational meetings in early June to present findings from legal counsel on a number of issues facing the district.

The public meetings will be held on three consecutive evenings — Monday, June 6 at the Chase County High School Auditorium; Tuesday, June 7 at the Wauneta Legion Hall; and again Wednesday, June 8 at the Chase County High School Auditorium. All meetings will begin at 7 p.m. MST.

Eddie Nichols of Wauneta, chair of the CCHD, strongly urges people to attend one of the three meetings.

He said the board has not taken any position on how to proceed. They are more focused on making sure people become informed, he said.

A petition effort put the formation of a hospital district on the May, 2010 Primary ballot. The measure passed 634-569.

The goal of the petition drive centered on creating an elected hospital board. County commissioners officially created the district and appointed members in September, 2010.

Since that time, board members have been exploring the duties and responsibilities of the district. Unclear about what needed to be done, the board members sought assistance from legal counsel on how to proceed. One of the biggest issues at hand centered on whether the county hospital must be transferred into the hospital district. A lengthy legal review of the situation indicates the hospital does not have to be transferred.

The review also addressed a number of questions and scenarios as well as costs associated with a transfer.

“We want to know what the people want us to do,” Nichols said this week. Estimates put the cost between $200,000 and $300,000 to transfer the hospital. Nichols said there’s too much money involved to make a decision without input from the public.

Other considerations

In addition to the financial impact involved, the attorney’s review brought several unexpected revelations involving the district.

According to counsel, hospital district board members have the sole power to dispose of the hospital. If the hospital is transferred to the hospital district, board members could lease or sell off the facility without a vote of the people.

Nichols has said he doubts that’s what the people wanted when they approved the hospital district.

After the initial appointments by the county commissioners, the hospital district will not be a fully elected board until the 2014 elections. If the people want to remove a member of the hospital district board, it can only be done at regular elections or by a recall petition and special election.