

Voters to see Chase County health care issue on ballot May 15

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Wednesday, 25 April 2012 20:34 - Last Updated Thursday, 26 April 2012 21:27

By Sheri Hink

The Wauneta Breeze

Voters will see an important issue regarding health care in Chase County on the May 15 primary ballot. Voters will be asked to vote on the dissolution of the Chase County Hospital District. The initiative was brought forward by petition of registered voters to dissolve the Chase County Hospital District.

It is important for voters to understand the issue before going to the polls on May 15. Many voters may be confused by the issue, as the Chase County Hospital District and the Chase County Community Hospital are separate entities but appear to be very related, if not the same. The fact is that these two entities are completely separate.

Chase County Hospital District

The Chase County Community Hospital District is a political subdivision and a separate entity from the County Hospital. It was brought forth by petition in the summer of 2009 and voted into law in 2010. There are no health care facilities managed by the hospital district.

The Hospital District was formed with an initial board appointed by the county commissioners. Current board members include William Bauerle, Bob Mendenhall and Vicky Heskett of Imperial, Eddie Nichols of Wauneta and Rand Levy of Champion.

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Two new board members will be elected in the May 15 primary election. If the voters decide to dissolve the hospital district the incoming board members will assist with the dissolution of the district.

A common reason for creating a hospital district was to provide an elected board for the hospital. What the hospital district actually created was a new political subdivision known as the Chase County Hospital District. The Hospital District has an elected board, but the board does not oversee the Chase County Community Hospital. The only way the elected board could govern the hospital would be if the hospital was transferred to the hospital district.

Thus far, the tax monies received by the hospital district have largely been used to set up the structure of the district. The goals and priorities of the district are still in development. Assuming both the district and community hospital continue to exist after the May election some possible activities the hospital district could complete would be to levy taxes for the betterment of the hospital, raise private funds for the hospital or solicit donations for the hospital.

Chase County Community Hospital

The Chase County Community Hospital is designated by law as a County Hospital and currently operates under the laws governing county hospitals.

The Chase County Community Hospital was established in 1977 and is governed by a five-member board. Current board members include William Bauerle, Bob Mendenhall and Vicky Heskett of Imperial and Eddie Nichols of Wauneta. There is currently one vacancy on the board.

As a legal entity separate from the hospital district, the county hospital is not governed by the hospital district. The focus of the community hospital since its inception is to provide medical

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services in Chase County. The community hospital operates under a \$10 million budget and employs over 100 individuals.

Under Nebraska law, the Chase County Community Hospital is not obligated to transfer its assets or operations to the newly formed hospital district unless the county hospital and hospital district have entered into an agreement of some type for that purpose.

Individuals close to this issue have estimated that the legal fees to complete a transfer of the hospital into the hospital district could cost as much as \$200,000 or more.

The community hospital and the Chase County Community Hospital Foundation are able to accomplish many of the same things that the district has the potential to accomplish.

There are differences between the two entities including how board members are selected and other general powers over operation of hospitals and other health care facilities. A summary of differences is provided below.

Summary of differences

The graphic below provides a summary of the major differences between county hospitals and hospital districts. The information was originally vetted by a legal team and later amended by the Chase County Community Hospital Foundation include changes made by LB995 which was signed into law on April 5th, 2012.

The Chase County Hospital Foundation has been providing this information to the public.

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The information presented in the graphic is based on Nebraska State Statutes-Nebraska Local Hospital District Act Sections 23-3528 through 23-3578 and Nebraska Statutes 23-3502 through 23-3526, and 77-3442 and 77-3443.

Question on the ballot

Voters will be asked the following question on the May 15 ballot: "Shall the Chase County Hospital District be dissolved?"

A vote of YES will dissolve the Hospital District. New hospital district board members elected on the same ballot will assist the current board with dissolving the hospital district.

A vote of NO will keep the hospital district intact. The hospital district will continue to exist as a separate entity from the Chase County Community Hospital with separate tax levy privileges.

More information

Those with questions regarding this issue or who would like additional information may contact board members of either the community hospital or the hospital district.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This article was written to help Chase County voters better understand this important health care issue which will appear on the May 15 ballot and was not intended to influence the vote in either direction.