

Board mulls fate of Curlew Clinic

By Brenda Starkey

CURLEW – Curlew community residents last week told the Ferry County Public Hospital Board that they want to keep the Curlew Clinic.

Some 25 people signed in to the FCPHD board meeting Tuesday, April 25, to hear what the board members had to say about the clinic and to urge them to keep a clinic in Curlew.

"I assume you are all here because you care about the Curlew Clinic," FCPHD Chief Executive Officer Aaron Edwards said. "Your concern is very much appreciated."

The clinic's 10-year lease ends next February, and hospital officials are in the process of negotiating a new lease and also looking at possibilities if

that process fails, Edwards explained to the audience.

"It is not my intention or the board's intention to pull the plug on Curlew but to look at the options," Edwards said.

The board wants the process to be transparent, Edwards said, adding that community members have the right to hear the options and maybe point out some that have not yet been considered.

Possible options include possibly buying the civic club building and outfitting it as a clinic, bringing in modular units to serve as a clinic or renovating the old fire hall. Other options include the Curlew Presbyterian Church being gifted to the district with the caveat that the food bank would also operate out of the building or that the clinic could

be located on some property that a staff member offered to gift to the district. Another possibility is to stay in the present location.

The district has received two proposals from Kettle River LLC, which owns the present Curlew Clinic. One would offer a 15-year lease starting at \$4,400 per month and raising two percent a year. At the end of the lease, the building would be gifted to the district. The second proposal is a three-year lease at \$3,500 per month with the building being for sale during the lease, Edwards said.

Former board members have said that the arrangement of the original lease was that the building of the

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current Curlew Clinic would be gifted to the district at the end of the lease.

"We did not do our due diligence and get that in writing," Edwards said.

The present building contains 4,700 square feet which includes a waiting area, exam rooms, offices for providers, an apartment for visiting nurses and others who come to do business with the hospital and a classroom with a mirrored wall that has been used for yoga classes and other things.

The district paid \$10,263.69 per month base rent through February with the payment increasing to \$10,571.60 from March 1 through February 2018.

The contract, which began March 1, 2009, specified an annual rent increase each year with the first year starting at \$8,102.25 per month.

"People will keep coming back if we take care of them," a former clinic staff member said. "If we don't take care of them,

they will go elsewhere."

"I don't like to travel," another woman said. "I think we could get by with a whole lot less."

Former district CEO Ron O'Halloran said that the building cost \$1 million to build, and when the LLC gets its money back, the building will be gifted to the community.

"Now we've got a building that's worth more than when it was built," he said. He also said that the district had a 30-year loan through Key Bank, but the board decided to lease the building instead of buying it.

"We are a board," said board member Nancy Giddings. "We have the

responsibility to handle public dollars. Our decision is not based on emotion. It has to be based on the money."

"We're not willing to lease for another three years and then have to make another decision," Giddings said.

"We've got a problem. We need a clinic," Roger Theile said. "But you've got to protect that hospital center and that emergency room before you worry about satellite clinics."

"I feel I came here and learned what I wanted to learn," Giddings said, adding that the district will deal with the LLC if it can.

"But it has to be clear and on paper," she said. "But if not, we still need a clinic."