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Voter forums scheduled for hospital sale information

By Rollie Atkinson Sonoma West Staff

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Recently announced sale of Healdsburg facility requires district voters' approval on Nov. 3

The recently announced sale of the Healdsburg District Hospital (HDH) cannot be completed without the approval of a majority of voters in the North Sonoma County Healthcare District at the upcoming Nov. 3 General Election. The north county healthcare district includes voters in Windsor, Healdsburg, Geyserville, Cloverdale and all of rural north county.

The district is offering three upcoming voter and community information sessions to share details of the proposed ownership change and to field questions from the public. —

The virtual Zoom sessions are scheduled for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday (Aug. 17, 18 and 19) next week, each starting at 5:30 p.m. Participants do not have to pre-register. The Zoom meeting ID is 971-2718-8159. To connect by telephone, call +1 (669) 900-6833.

The public can also find more information on the pending purchase agreement at www.HealdsburgHospital.org.

The healthcare district board voted unanimously on July 30 to accept terms of a purchase from NorCal HealthConnect, LLC, a secular affiliate of Providence St. Joseph which also owns and operates Memorial Hospital in Santa Rosa and has pending ownership agreement with Petaluma Valley Hospital, under terms similar to the one in Healdsburg.

Leadership of the healthcare district has been searching for a strategic partner for the past several years, in on-again, off-again negotiations with various regional hospital companies.

“Our Partnership Committee and Board of Directors have worked hard to craft a fair and comprehensive agreement, and to finalize what has been a multi-year conversation with Providence St. Joseph Health. This agreement offers the community the security of preserving the hospital’s essential departments and continuing the century-long history it has of serving the community,” said Healdsburg District Hospital’s Chief Executive Officer, James P. Schuessler in a prepared statement released following the July 30 board vote.

The agreement requires NorCal HealthConnect to operate the hospital for 30 years, unless there is a change to the licensing where the hospital is no longer a critical access hospital. In that case the agreement ends at 20 years.

The buyer is paying \$15 million for lands and facility, according to a district board member. A new community board (2/3rds NorCal HealthConnect and 1/3 community members) would get a one-time \$10 million payment for various programs and initiatives.

The current \$150 per year parcel tax will stay in place, with \$1 million a year to go to the retirement of the \$10 million bonded debt and \$2.5 million directed to NorCal

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HealthConnect for hospital operations.

The buyer is responsible for all seismic upgrades of the 50-year old hospital. It is possible the buyer will build a new hospital instead of completing the expensive (at least \$20 million) retrofitting.

HDH has been re-negotiating doctor contracts and most are now salary-plus-performance based, rated by national averages of productivity. The healthcare district board will remain in place but will no longer manage the hospital. It may choose to more closely align with the nonprofit Healthcare Foundation of Northern Sonoma County on community health initiatives.

"All clinical services provided at HDH currently will be provided subsequent to the closing of the transaction. As a part of the secular organizational structure of Providence St. Joseph Health, the only procedures not permitted in future operation of the hospital are destruction of human embryos, elective abortion and physician-assisted suicide, none of which are available now," stated the current hospital administration in a prepared statement.

The hospital dates its origins to 1905 and the present facility has been in operation since 1972. After a series of private and corporate ownership changes, the hospital became a community, taxpayer-owned hospital with the formation of the healthcare district in 2001.

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