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County gives blessing vote on hospital project

Officials are moving forward on Benewah Community Hospital's proposed expansion.

Recent drawings show a complete overhaul to the exterior of the hospital and St. Maries Family Medicine. More sketches from architect David Johnson of Johnson Johnson Crabtree Architects are on the way, hospital CEO Brian Nall said.

Though the drawings have excited hospital staff, Mr. Nall is focusing on the financial side of things. He wants the public to know about the project and how the hospital will pay for it, because Benewah County voters will decide whether or not the hospital can incur the debt for the project.

"We're a county facility," he said. He compared the November vote to the one conducted this spring over a garbage transfer station. "We fall under the same laws because we're a public entity. We're doing the same thing. We're servicing our debt on the profits of the hospital and not by raising taxes."



The 7th Street view of the proposed expansion to the hospital is shown here. The area of the hospital that now houses administrative offices would be demolished to make room for the new facility. Tentative plans call for the new clinic to be built over the top of the existing clinic, which would be demolished when construction ends to provide parking. This view is from 9th Street looking east.



Though it's possible that taxes would pay for the work if the hospital cannot, but since the facility is currently debt-free, Mr. Nall said this is very unlikely. He and other administrators will schedule a series of public forums on the

topic which will start this fall. Questions about the plans and the hospital's financial situation will be welcomed, he said. County officials agreed to put the issue on the Nov. 3 ballot. The hospital will ask the voters for permission to borrow \$28.5 million. The project includes a three-story addition to the hospital facing 7th St. and a new clinic built on the current site in St. Maries. It will include a new medical surgical department and specialty clinic and would add 30,000 sq. feet to the facility.

Mr. Nall said some taxpayers might balk at the possibility of a tax hike, but he wants to point out the negative alternatives to revamping the facility. "We would essentially have to shut down that section to do renovations" if something went wrong with the aging infrastructure, he said. By implementing the expansion plan, Mr. Nall said the flow of patients will not be interrupted during construction.

Assuming the voters approve the debt, Mr. Nall said they hope to start construction next summer and be done by summer 2013.