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Hospital launches campaign

If it weren't for Frazier, they'd be building already. That's how confident CEO Brian Nall is about Benewah Community Hospital's ability to service debt on a proposed renovation and expansion of the St. Maries facility.

But because of a 2006 court case (Frazier vs. City of Boise) the hospital as a public entity must get voter approval to go into debt, even though taxes will not be raised.



Hospital CEO Brian Nall talks to hospital staff about the proposed expansion project. - Rebecca Thomas

“We don't want to take on a project that would increase tax dollars,” Mr. Nall said last week in a presentation to hospital staff. The \$28.5 million project will go before Benewah County voters Nov. 3, where it needs a 2/3 majority to be approved.

In the presentation, which will soon be offered to area citizens and organizations, Mr. Nall outlined reasons why the hospital can afford the project, as well as why it's a good investment.

He pointed out that the hospital is debt free. Last year the hospital paid more than \$100,000 every month on debt. Estimates released last week show approximate payments on the expansion to be \$55,000 a month.

“We'll be paying half of what we're used to paying,” he said. The payments are based on a 30-year repayment period after Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement and depreciation payments are included.

Approximately half of the hospital's patients are covered by the government programs, which means the hospital will be partially reimbursed for the cost of the project, if it passes voter approval. “We're going to get half that cost back,” Mr. Nall said.

He also outlined the three main challenges the aging hospital faces: the lack of private patient rooms, limited space for medical offices and limited parking. The project includes a 60,000 sq. foot expansion with 20 patient beds, a new clinic and new equipment, including a CT-scanner, MRI machine and digital mammography system. At the presentation, one staff member asked who would be voting on the measure.

“The entire county,” Mr. Nall answered. He said he was in the process of setting up public meetings for residents in Plummer, St. Maries and other communities. He said he would be spreading information throughout the county until the election, and there will likely be a public hearing on the issue this fall.