

St. Maries Gazette Record, Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009 – by Chris D’Angelo

Hospital project could take three years

In this case, bigger will prove better.

County voters approved the Benewah Community Hospital’s \$28.5 million expansion project in St. Maries Nov. 3. “All of our staff is very, very excited,” CEO of Benewah Community Hospital Brian Nall said of the result. The request by the hospital board to borrow the money passed with an approval of 67.5 percent. A 66 percent vote in favor was required. The vote was close.

Although voters in St. Maries were overwhelmingly in favor of the project n 74 percent voting yes n those on the west side of the county opposed the proposal. Only 42 percent of voters in Plummer and 37 percent in Tensed supported the project. Regardless, the hospital was able to pull out the two thirds majority needed to win. “Getting a supermajority is a tough task,” Mr. Nall said. “We are very encouraged the community was so supportive.”

Included in the overall project n with construction expected to begin spring of 2011 and take three years to complete n are an expanded emergency department, a new clinic, new private patient rooms and bathrooms, modern exam rooms, updated medical equipment and 75 additional covered parking spaces.

All in all, the project will bring the 50-year-old hospital building into the 21st century. “If we are going to meet the needs of the community we have to meet their expectations, and they expect us to have a hospital up to code, up to regulation,” board member Carol Humphrey said. “

It is a project that will take a lot of time and careful planning. “We want to make sure we move carefully forward so we don’t spend unnecessarily,” Mr. Nall said. “We want to take it easy and do it right the first time.”

The hospital will have a regular board meeting Nov. 19 n early due to the Thanksgiving holiday n during which board members will begin to discuss the next step.

“We still have to not only hire the architect, but he also has to spend time doing the detailed drawings,” Mr. Nall said. “There’s a lot of paperwork and planning to do.”

For now, however, the vote has energized the hospital board and staff. “It’s a wonderful thing. I think it’s a real sign of progress,” Ms. Humpfrey said. “I am just so appreciative of all the people that voted yes.”

While there is still plenty of regular business to attend to, Mr. Nall says he is excited to begin looking toward the future of Benewah Community Hospital. “I’m glad that everyone heard us out and listened to the presentations that we had,” he said. “I am very excited about the future, not only for the hospital but also Benewah County.”