

Hospital wrestles over airplane options

By Sharon Corcoran

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After looking over purchase and rental options for two types of airplanes, the Goodland Regional Medical Center board isn't sure how the hospital can best afford to replace its plane, though members think it should.

Chief Financial Officer Jim Precht gave numbers on the costs for a municipal lease to buy a 1993 King Air C90B, to buy the plane for cash with the trade-in value of the hospital's current King Air, a 1972 model, and for a municipal lease rental agreement on an Eclipse 500, a small jet, at the board's meeting Monday.

The hospital uses its plane to fly in specialists from Denver, Longmont, Colo., and Colorado Springs, as well as Hays, Garden City, Wichita and the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City.

Learning hauling visiting specialists is likely to cost the hospital around \$3 million over the next five years, the board put off until the next meeting a decision on which avenue to pursue, though most of the board members seemed to feel keeping the specialists coming here is necessary.

The hospital can handle the costs of buying the King Air, Precht said

Pilot weighs in on airplane purchase

The hospital's pilot, Dave Marlowe, listened to Chief Financial Officer Jim Precht's presentation on the impact of having an airplane to transport specialists and the cost of replacing it and took questions from the board via telephone and told the board what he had found in his research of the planes and what his experience has been.

Marlowe clearly preferred the King Air for its safety rating, passenger seating and cargo room and said the Eclipse would not be able to land on icy runways and would have no fuel efficiency on the route between Goodland and Denver. And he said maintenance on the King Air could be done in Denver, while the Eclipse would have to be flown to Albuquerque for maintenance.

"I don't think money should be the only consideration," Marlowe said. "If the only way financially to keep the program is the jet, I'm willing to go to school

to learn to fly it. But we don't fly for pleasure — we fly for business, so when there are icy runways, we go anyway."

The Eclipse can't land on icy runways, he said, since it doesn't have reverse, and with the tiny main wheel system, its brakes will burn out all the time. They also have throttle problems, he added.

Between here and Denver, he said, the jet's flight pattern would be straight up or straight down, so it would have no fuel efficiency. Also, he said, even though the Eclipse lists 5-6 seats, two would be "kiddie" seats, so it would only have room for the pilot and four passengers.

In the King Air, Marlowe said, there is room for eight people and as much luggage as they want to bring. The Eclipse is limited to 60 pounds of cargo, he said, while the King Air can handle 350.

— the cash reserves are there. The decision revolves around which airplane could handle the passenger load, he said.

Precht recommended eliminating "convenience flights," picking doctors from Colorado Springs and Longmont up there rather than in Denver. Those cost the hospital \$38,000 a year in additional expenses, he said.

Precht told the board he sought to answer several questions: "What if we didn't provide the services? What if we didn't provide convenience transportation to Longmont and Colorado Springs? Or if we raised the cost of these for the doctors who use it? Or raised the cost of transporting doctors?"

For the impact on revenues, Precht said he used the actual deposit

information. He used numbers for 2007 and took the numbers from January to June this year and doubled it.

Administrator Jay Jolly talked with the doctors who are flown in to get an idea who would still travel to Goodland and who wouldn't. Precht estimated what it would cost the hospital to lose some of the visiting specialists if they didn't provide air

transportation.

With no airplane service, Precht said, the number of patients treated would be reduced by 88 percent whether based on 2007 numbers or 2008. The impact to net revenue would be an 87 percent reduction based on 2007 numbers or 89 percent based on 2008.

With only the loss of the convenience flights to Longmont and Colorado Springs, he said, there would be a reduction of 36 percent of patients treated and 12 percent in net revenue.

If the hospital raises the cost to doctors for transportation, Precht said, it would lose about 46 percent of cases treated and 58 percent of revenue.

Total costs for the municipal lease purchase for the King Air would be \$3,276,000 without the "convenience" flights or \$3,325,000 with over five years. For the cash purchase, it would be \$3,174,000 or \$3,225,000 and for the rental agreement for the Eclipse, \$2,179,125 or \$2,228,437.

Marlowe estimated it would cost the hospital \$349,000 to refurbish the 1972 model but said he would have to get definite numbers.

"You would still have a 1972 plane," he said.

Board member Doug Irvin wondered if it would cost the hospital less to pay the doctors for driving time than to replace the airplane. He also thought the doctors might be waiting nearly as long to get on the plane as it would take to just drive.

"I think it's ridiculous to fly to Denver," he said.

Flying the doctors in adds four billable hours to the clinic, Precht said, adding that with the hospital providing a private flight, the doctors don't wait long to get on the plane.

"We need to look at what it would cost the hospital on cash flow," Precht said.

"If we don't do this," Jolly said, "a lot of services go away, as well as a \$1.4 million deposit (each year)."

"My concern," said board member Brenda McCants, "is we have spent years developing these relationships with these doctors."

"We are going to pay a lot more for air services for the next five years than for the last five years," said member Randy Coleman, "and that means having a lot less money to operate the hospital."

"I think we need to buy the aircraft, but it's a gamble. Where are we going to squeeze the money from if the growth isn't there to cover it?"

Oops! Oversize load stuck

"Oversize Load," as draped across the back of the truck, was an understatement.

A natural gas cooler, on its way from Tulsa, Okla., to Canada, ended up high centered on a bump in U.S. Business 24 blocking traffic Wednesday afternoon. At 14 feet tall, it was too tall to go under I-70, said Sheriff Kevin Butts, so when it came up on K-27, it was routed around to Business 24 to meet up with K-27 on the other side of the overpass.

Since it was so tall, he said, the cooler was on a lower-decked trailer, which was easy to get high centered. There was no damage, he said; McB's unhooked the tractor from the trailer and lifted the cooler and pulled it back on.

"It caused a lot of curiosity," the sheriff said.

The gigantic machine, which is used to cool natural gas when it's pulled out of the ground, he said, was built in Tulsa and was on its way to somewhere in Canada.



A natural gas cooler, on its way from Tulsa, Okla., to Canada, ended up high centered on a bump in U.S. Business 24 blocking traffic Wednesday afternoon. It got a lot of attention from drivers on the highway just west of Pioneer Park. Photo by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

City scraps plan to build new hangar at Renner Field after getting two bids

By Tom Betz

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City commissioners agreed last Monday to scrap plans for a new hangar at Renner Field, and told the engineer to thank the two contractors who bid.

Airport boosters touted the plan as an economic development move, but commissioners said they thought it was too much money to spend on an improvement that wouldn't produce much income.

Members of the city airport board and Darin Neufeld, an engineer from Evans, Bierly, Hutchison and Associates, who handles the city airport projects, had come to the commission in May asking the city to consider building a hangar estimated to cost about \$350,000.

During a budget work session in July, the commissioners said they wanted to wait on the project until the status of the 1934 barrel hangar had been decided.

Neufeld and Larry Dickey, chair-

man of the airport board, told commissioners that Monday was the last meeting before the deadline on the bids on the new hangar would expire.

Commissioner Josh Dechant said he was against building a hangar at this time.

"I question if we need that expense," he said.

"I think we need a community hangar," Commissioner Dave Daniels said, "and by selling the barrel hangar, we don't have one."

Mayor Rick Billinger said he did not think the new hangar was a good idea because the city was not going to generate any revenue.

Daniels said all the existing hangars are privately owned, and that the city needs a community hangar to continue to have the best airport between Denver and Hays.

Commissioner Annette Fairbanks said she could see good points and some bad points.

"It is a lot of money to spend,"

she said. "I don't know. I guess I am undecided."

Daniels said a hangar is like the city swimming pool.

"We don't make any money on that, either," he said.

Dechant asked who would get the fees for the overnight storage of airplanes.

Neufeld said if the city builds the hangar without using federal money, the rent would come to the city, minus any share for the airport operator — John Collett — for towing the aircraft. Neufeld said a lot of towns set the income up to pay the utilities and minor upkeep.

"I don't see building it to have one person prosper," Dechant said.

"I think we would make more money off a hangar than the swimming pool," Daniels replied.

Billinger asked if the fact there is a hangar available is advertised. Dickey said the Federal Aviation Administration publishes information about what is available at each

airport. He said a lot of what gets out is word of mouth between pilots, and the airport has seen an increase in the number of larger jet aircraft landing here.

Neufeld said the proposed hangar would not be able to house big jets because of their high tails.

Billinger asked what can be put in one of the "T" hangars the city has built at the airport. Daniels said a small single-engine or twin-engine plane will fit in those. Neufeld said some of the new smaller business jets might fit as well.

"With the economy and losing kids in the schools, I do not feel it is the right time to be doing this," Billinger said.

"Then on the other side, we need to consider that we need more help for the community," Dickey said. "You never know when a plane with corporate people might land and spend the night in Goodland and decide they like the town and want to open a business."

Daniels said a lot of pilots will look at the Goodland airport because they want to avoid landing along the congested Front Range area of Colorado.

Commissioner John Garcia said the commission has been through the budget hearing and have cut the budget.

Billinger said it appeared to him the consensus was not to build the hangar. Neufeld said he would notify the bidders that neither bid will be accepted. The bids and who was bidding was not

corrections

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made public because the commissioners had decided not to do the project. The commissioners did not know the figures nor who was bidding as Neufeld said he was not going to even present the bids if the commission decided not to do the project.

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