

## Mill levy agreement reconfigured to support RMCHCS

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent  
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McKinley County commissioners spent part of the Oct. 5 meeting considering how to help Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services deal with some of its financial issues.

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The use of mill levy funds came up as a way to provide relief. A mill levy is a tax rate that is applied to an assessed value of a property.

In a previous interview with the *Sun*, McKinley County Attorney Doug Decker said the hospital had previously used the tax money they received for operational costs, maintenance, and repair.

Now the hospital administration has asked if the funds can be used to help with payroll.

The commissioners approved the requested change with the stipulation that the hospital would give the commissioners a general report on how the money is being used and what is left in the account after they've paid their employees.

In an interview with the *Sun*, the McKinley County Commissioners Board Chairman and Dist.1 Commissioner Billy Moore said the commissioners' only issue with the hospital was that they didn't always tell them what the money was being used for, and that's why they're requiring the report now.

Hospital interim CEO, Don Smithburg was unavailable for comment when the *Sun* reached out, but he gave an emailed statement to KRQE News 13 that was published on Oct. 4.

"We appreciate the community's passion and commitment to ensuring RMCHCS remains a vital health care resource and economic driver for Gallup," Smithburg said in the statement. "We share this passion, which is why new leadership with deep professional experience was recruited to help stabilize the organization.

We will continue our intense focus on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead," he continued. "Right now, that means stabilizing the hospital's financial outlook and quality assurance programs after years of mismanagement."

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Moore said the commission's hesitancy was based on the hospital's past performance.

"The only problem we had previously was that [the previous administration] were (sic) comingling the money and there was no accounting for the mill levy money that we have to account for as a government agency, because it's taxpayer money," Moore said. "That was one of the concerns.

"We wanted to make sure that it was definitely accounted for, where if it was audited, or needed to be audited, there was a clear understanding of what it was used for and where it was used," Moore said.

Decker estimated that the hospital's current payroll is about \$1.5 million a month. This amount is not for travel employees who visit the hospital, but rather for those who work for RMCHCS directly.

The commissioners discussed the issue at length, although no one from the hospital was at the meeting.

Moore said he met with Smithburg and the hospital's board chairman Steve McKernan, along with county manager Anthony Dimas about a month ago.

"I met with them and they just suggested that it would help them financially get over the hurdle to turn the hospital around and get things going," Moore said.

In an interview with the *Sun*, Decker explained that the hospital representatives wanted the agreement to end on Dec. 31, 2022, while some of the commissioners wanted it to conclude in six months.

"So [the commissioners] came to a unanimous consensus to have it alerted that it will end when the commission gives the hospital 90 days' notice that they're ending that agreement," Decker

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said.

Dimas was the one who suggested the six-month time limit.

“It gives us time to evaluate what’s working and what’s not working, and it doesn’t tie our hands for the long haul,” Dimas said.

Dimas explained that after the six-month period was over, the commissioners would reevaluate the situation and determine whether the agreement should continue for another six months.

“We want to help them,” Dimas clarified. “I didn’t want [the agreement] to be for a long time; I wanted a short period, so we could evaluate it and see if it’s working.”

By Molly Ann Howell  
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