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Petaluma Valley Hospital's future up for discussion

The Petaluma Health Care District will carve out time from its public meeting tonight to discuss the future operation of Petaluma Valley Hospital, which is owned by the district but is operated through a lease with St. Joseph Health in Sonoma County. That lease expires in January 2017.

The 7 p.m. forum is one of several special sessions aimed at creating an opportunity for public to help craft the criteria used to select the future operator of the hospital, said Ramona Faith, CEO of the Petaluma Health Care District.

"The feedback from the public helps the board shape our evaluation criteria, so we can best serve the community and identify the best hospital operator moving forward," Faith said.

In October, the district announced that it had narrowed the playing field to four potential hospital operators who each responded to the district's request for proposals issued in the spring. St. Joseph Health, which has operated the hospital since 1997, is among the candidates.

Faith said the potential operators are in the process of revamping their offers and that these revised proposals are expected to be submitted to the district by the end of this week. District board members will not have reviewed revised proposals before tonight's meeting, she said.

The whole process is part of the district's "due diligence" in selecting the best operator, Faith said.

Aside from St. Joseph Health, the other three potential operators include Sutter Health, Prime Healthcare Services and Strategic Global Management.

St. Joseph Health in Sonoma County is part of St. Joseph Health Ministry, based in Orange. The ministry operates 16 hospitals in Northern California, Southern California, Texas and New Mexico. Sutter Health is headquartered in Sacramento, with services in more than 100 cities in towns in Northern California and 24 acute-care hospitals, including the county's newest hospital in north Santa Rosa.

Prime Healthcare Services is a for-profit hospital management company with headquarters in Ontario in San Bernardino County. It operates 38 acute care hospitals in eleven states. Strategic Global Management is also a for-profit corporation that is involved in the management of seven hospitals in California, two of which are former district hospitals.

Two previous public forums were held during district board meetings in December. Tonight's forum will be held in the main conference room of the district's offices at 1425 N. McDowell Blvd. in Petaluma. A fourth forum is scheduled for Jan. 14, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the same location.

Faith said time allotted for the forum on the district board's agenda is between 30 to 40 minutes. But she said more time will be allowed if many local residents show up to give input.

Members of the public, she said, will be given the chance to help weigh in on which core services should be maintained at the hospital, as well as identifying other criteria for evaluating the best operator. That

might include potential financial investment into the facility and the availability of funds for treatment and prevention services in the local community.

After the evaluation process is complete, the district board is tasked with making a recommendation to the public. That recommendation will probably go before voters by the end of the year, where they will be asked to either approve or reject that recommendation.