

Health levy to fund nursing, environmental divisions

Programs scaled back, personnel cuts imminent if levy fails

By **MANDY HOCHSTEDLER**
Examiner Staff Writer

The Logan County Health District will make one last attempt Tuesday to pass a 10-year replacement levy that would secure current programming and staffing levels.

If approved by county voters, the 1-mill issue would generate between \$900,000 and \$1 million per year for operating expenses, and would cost the owner of a \$100,000 property about \$30.62 per year. This third attempt follows similar ballot issues that failed in November 2007 and in March. The levy primarily supports programs in the nursing division, such as childhood and adult immunization clinics, the investigation and control of communicable diseases, lead testing, education initiatives and in home public health nursing, along with some environmental division programs.

“The health district’s nursing programs especially help out the elderly and children and toddlers,” levy chairman Adam Brannon said.

“As far as levies go, the public doesn’t have to pay very much for all of the services provided.” If the levy request is voted down Tuesday, the agency, whose current levy funds expire at the end of the year, will be funded by inside millage in the amount of \$500,000, as determined by the county budget commission (see Inside Millage story).

Because this inside millage amount is about half of what the levy would generate, budget cuts would be necessary in the case of levy failure. Health Commissioner Dr. Boyd Hoddinott said agency personnel, which make up the largest part of budget expenses, would be reduced from 34 current staff to 28 staff members by Dec. 31. Position reductions would be in the aforementioned divisions and in clerical staff.

ELECTION 2008

“What the public will notice immediately is our level of service. We will not be as fast or efficient with less staff members.”

— **Dr. Boyd Hoddinott**

Health Commissioner

“Gradual personnel reductions might be required from there (Dec. 31), but we have to see first how the economy shapes up and the possibility of raising our other fees,” he said.

Personnel numbers are already down from 39 Staff members last year — a result of not hiring new staff following retirements and resignations, Dr. Hoddinott said.

With less staff members, nursing and environmental health programs would have to be scaled back.

“What the public will notice immediately is our level of service,” Dr. Hoddinott said. “We will not be as fast or efficient with less staff members.”

The immunizations program would be “significantly impacted” in the situation, the health commissioner said. Immunization clinics would be offered less often and those clinics likely would only be staffed with one nurse, as opposed to the clinics right now. Health board members would have to cut costs for other nursing programs as well, such as the newborn baby visit program, where either less visits would be performed or visits would be shorter in length.

Also, the environmental division’s nuisance investigation and abatement program would be virtually eliminated, with complaints only taken down on a waiting list, Dr. Hoddinott said. The LCHD investigated more than 400 complaints last year. Cost cutting methods already employed this year include closing the agency office over the lunch hour, eliminating the fall mass vaccination clinic and the free school nursing program, and sending the enforcement of the smoking ban back to the state level.