

August 12, 2024

Position Statement – St. Croix Health Center

The Board of the Town of Star Prairie strongly supports retention of the St. Croix Health Center as a vital service for all citizens of the county. We are opposed to selling the facility to offset borrowing costs for future projects, such as the 2025 highway department building or the 2027 jail expansion.

County Board Chair Bob Long stated in the June 18 Administration Committee meeting that he believes *“80% of the taxpayers of the county are paying the debt service of \$1.5 million although they’re not taking advantage of the facility. In other words, the vast majority of the taxpayers are supporting a facility that they’re not getting any advantage out of...and so my question to the committee is how comfortable are we in that scenario, given that this isn’t a mandated service?”*

Taxpayers are not subsidizing the St. Croix Health Center’s **operations**. The County has acknowledged that the facility is well-managed and has been operating in the black since 2017 [county-provided financials 2016-2023]. This is a remarkable accomplishment in this challenging era for all healthcare providers.

The annual debt service for the general obligation bond used to fund the new Health Center in 2016 is approximately \$1.5 million. According to County Administrator Ken Witt at the June 18 committee meeting, selling the facility would not cover this debt; instead, the sale proceeds would be applied to offset a new general obligation bond. The final payment on the Health Center’s bond is scheduled for 2035, which is eleven years away.

St. Croix County residents regard the St. Croix Health Center as a vital cornerstone in our community, offering essential services and high-quality care. County residents voted resoundingly in the November 2008 and the spring 2012 elections to continue to operate a public nursing home if property tax dollars were needed to fund the operations. They voted again in the 2014 spring election to put 10 new supervisors who supported the Health Center on the 19-member board. County residents need this facility, county residents want this facility, and they’ve voted repeatedly to support this facility through tax dollars.

According to U.S. Census Bureau data, 15% of our county's population was aged 65 and older in 2020, and this figure is estimated to have risen to 16.1% by 2022. The increasing elder care needs place significant pressure on many families, creating widespread impacts on employers and social services that are difficult to measure. Unlike childcare, which generally decreases as children grow older and require less supervision, elder care demands tend to escalate unpredictably. Furthermore, some working individuals are responsible for both young children and aging parents simultaneously.

The St. Croix Health Center delivers compassionate, high-quality healthcare in a fiscally-responsible manner, supporting families during times of great need. Aging is an inevitable process and demographic shifts make it clear that the U.S. is struggling to provide affordable care for our aging population. The St. Croix Health Center is a center of excellence, accessible to everyone. It is essential that this facility remain under county ownership.

Our community has spoken loud and clear. The Board of the Town of Star Prairie urges the County Board to respect the democratic process and listen to the voices of its constituents. Know when to leave ~~well enough~~ excellent alone.

Star Prairie Town Board:

Tom Heintz, Chair

Michele Hermansen, Supervisor

Darryl Wendt, Supervisor

Brian Duggan, Supervisor

Bob Crotty, Supervisor