

Why did the Hospital choose Nob Hill? Were other choices considered?

Few people are ever faced with having to deal with the [f]right of eminent domain.

It is the ultimate bully pulpit. Governments and their surrogate agencies like libraries and hospitals use the threat of eminent domain to take property from unwilling owners who feel they cannot successfully "fight city hall."

Had the City of Cheyenne been able to use eminent domain instead of being prohibited, they would have been able to complete their hostile takeover of Cheyenne Light, Fuel and Power a few years ago. CLFP was lucky. Private property owners who have lived in their houses for generations have no such protection.

When the library was faced with not having City support for a new facility unless they built it near City Hall, a poor choice of location was presented. Even though a better, more centrally-located site was available and already owned by the City, requiring no displacement of residents, the Library Board did not believe they could get their project on a Specific Purposes ballot without City support and they surrendered to the location blackmail.

The local hospital believes it needs, or will need, a new facility and is growth-restricted in their current location.

So, they sought another location. Much has been written on these pages about their pursuit of land at the subdivision west of Cheyenne known as Nob Hill.

Those residents, like almost every other in Cheyenne, have never had to face the onslaught of a public juggernaut that wants your property.

When an agent representing the hospital threatened residents with eminent domain, most chose not to fight to retain their homes and agreed to sell. Even though the Hospital Board had no authorization to use eminent domain at this stage of negotiations, that did not stop the agent hired by the hospital from threatening it.

At this writing, all properties at Nob Hill have been purchased but one. The hospital has benched the unpleasant agent and is in direct negotiations with the lone holdout. If the process plays out and the county commissioners authorize the hospital to use condemnation and eminent domain to purchase this final parcel (six lots), many unpleasant revelations are likely to be made public. Fair market value is determined by comparable sales in the neighborhood and the last owner will have the right to reveal every purchase price of property at Nob Hill. If the agent deceived, misled or lied to a resident to get them to agree to sell, all of that will be disclosed to the public.

But why Nob Hill in the first place? What did that property have in its favor that the hospital could not choose another parcel - perhaps one devoid of houses or one offered as a donation for a new hospital site? Why uproot homeowners?

At a meeting this afternoon with three hospital officials, including Charles Harms, CRMC chief executive officer, I had the chance to question the choice of Nob Hill and review an area map showing about a dozen "potential" locations for such a new facility.

A new medical facility has been under consideration and study since Harms became CEO in January of 2004. Much research has been conducted into what and how other communities have determined when a new facility needed to be considered and constructed, where it should be located, and what the "campus" might consist of when completed.

Similar activities have been completed in Cheyenne. The hospital not only operates

what are commonly referred to as UMC-West (Memorial Hospital) and the former DePaul Hospital, but have several small houses near the hospital which also are used in the hospital's operation.

A 15 member task force developed a list of criteria for the best site for a new hospital. The various elements considered were weighted and the Nob Hill location scored highest. From our discussion, I learned that only one other of the considered sites would have required displacement of residents. Most were vacant land and one was where the former CF terminal stood, which would have required demolition of industrial buildings but not homes.

I was told that the criteria included what were labeled "hurdle conditions," meaning if they could not be met, the site would not be considered.

The "hurdle conditions" were:

- 100 acres of land
- "x" miles from the oil refinery
- Within 1/4 mile of the Interstate
- Local street access

They sought adequate land for future expansion. They also wanted City water and sewer and have been promised by the current administration that the Nob Hill property, now in the County, would be annexed if the hospital so requested. Whether that land, or land including Little America's or the Base's, is eligible for annexation will have to be covered in the next issue. We all know that the City would promise Chugwater as an annexation if they thought they could gain something from the promise.

While many of the items on the hospital's acquisition criteria list fit for Nob Hill, some do not.

One of their items would be met whenever chosen (if 100 acres) and that is adequate parking. From where Nob Hill is relative to the Interstate(s), aesthetics would also be met. The visibility, image and visual impact out there would be exceptional.

Another "want" on the criteria list was local transportation. Once again, the City

promised something it does not now provide - City bus service.

The acquisition of private residences began before the hospital has a formal commitment from either Little America or the federal government. They have a verbal commitment from the Holdings, I was told.

Two elements of the criteria list which were not met by the Nob Hill properties were "displacement of residents" and "cost."

While compassion for existing residents may have been discussed and shown at hospital board meetings, it was not extended to the residents by the agent retained to negotiate the purchases. I was assured that the agent did not have permission to use the words "eminent domain," and was not told to use a potential cancer wing or similar in discussions. He was not to bully residents, threaten or cajole them. And based on the discussion today (Tuesday, December 11), he most certainly was not authorized to belittle or ridicule property owners at Nob Hill, based on what I was told today.

While we did not discuss specific costs, an estimate of \$400 / sq. ft. cost was mentioned for medical facilities and a size of over 600,000 sq. ft. You can do the math. It was admitted that properties were offered to be donated to the hospital and from where the markings were on the large map, the most likely properties offered would have been by Doug Samuelson and the Lummis Ranch.

Access to some of the properties marked on the map would be problematic. One of the properties was within the shadow of Frontier Oil Refinery and I was told that the current hospital has, at times, problems with the odors blown by a southerly wind toward the hospital. Proximity to an oil refinery is also of concern due to the potential of an explosion or fire.

We spent some time discussing the cost of the land to build such a medical campus. Because the total cost is so great, land cost may not play a large role in the consideration. If 100 acres were purchased, and it is unlikely the hospital ever expected to have to purchase the Holdings land, at \$2 / sq. ft. (\$87,120 / acre), 100 acres would cost \$8,712,000.

A new hospital should handle the needs of Cheyenne and the region for perhaps 100 years so it is easy to see that land acquisition costs must be considered but cannot drive the decision as to where to place such a medical facility. Nob Hill alone is only 11-12 acres of the total but has caused grief, anger, sadness and consternation to those faced with having their land taken from them against their will. That is the way it was presented by the agent. That is not the way the hospital board and CEO wanted the land acquired. The lesson to be learned? Know who you hire and keep them on a short leash.

Herald pick-up locations

- City News - Downtown
 - BLM Building Lobby
 - Safeway - South Cheyenne
 - Wonder Bread Outlet - Ridge Rd.
 - Oroweat Bakery Outlet - SW Dr.
 - Borderline - Colorado Lottery
 - Laramie County Library
 - Laramie County Gov't Center - North
 - Herschler Building - North
 - VA Hospital - South Entrance
 - Town & County Liquors
 - Burger Inn
 - Luxury Diner
 - American Storage
 - Avenues Pet Clinic
 - Los Amigos
 - Diamond Horseshoe
 - Quick Draw Optical
 - Village Inn-Downtown
 - T-Joe's Steakhouse & Saloon
- Many, many other locations in the City and Laramie County*

In the county ...

- Fred's, the A & W,
- RA Lumber and Wild Horse
- Restaurant - all in Pine Bluffs
- Antelope Truck Stop and
- Panhandle Co-Op, Burns
- Albin Diner & General Store

Holiday Lights Tours on the Cheyenne Street Railway Trolley

The popular Holiday Lights Tours will run from December 15th through December 24th.

Tickets should be purchased in advance. They are on sale now at the Cheyenne Area Convention & Visitors Bureau located in the Cheyenne Depot at 121 West 15th Street. Or call with a credit card at 778-3133. The cost of the tickets is \$8 for adults and \$4 for children.