

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

When County Clerk Debbie Clark certified a petition drive last September, the process began to determine whether voters want to create a hospital district in Chase County.

That decision will come May 11 when Chase County voters go to the polls for the Primary Election.

On the non-partisan ballot, voters will see a ballot, "Hospital District Formation," with the question, "Shall the County of Chase, Nebraska form a local hospital district?"

Presently, the hospital's board of trustees is comprised of five members who are appointed by the three county commissioners.

While not specifically required, over the years commissioners have tried to appoint trustees to provide representation throughout the county.

A vote for or against

If voters decide against forming a hospital district, nothing will change and the current procedure of appointing hospital board members will continue.

Should voters favor creating a new hospital district, the first members of the five-seat district would still be appointed by the commissioners.

This occurs because the time frame for this election cycle will have passed, should a new district be created.

Then, in the 2012 Primary Election, two of the five district board seats will be up for election. Winners will take their new seat in June, 2012.

Then, in the 2014 Primary, the other three seats will be up for election. Only then will all five members of the district board be elected.

All members will be elected at-large to four-year terms. There is no provision in the election to provide representation from throughout the county.

Taxing authority created

The formation of a hospital district will give the hospital board something they've never had before—taxing authority.

According to state statute, a hospital district has its own taxing authority, the same as a school district, natural resources district, village, city or county.

The statute allows the hospital board to levy a tax of 3.5 cents per \$100 of valuation in the county. Last year's county valuation was slightly more than \$605 million.

If the board desired, they could seek an additional 3.5 cents per \$100 of valuation through a special election.

The hospital district levy would be outside of any levy limitations now in current statute, such as the limit faced by villages, cities and counties.

373 signatures verified

When petition organizers Sue Kinner and Penny Teply turned their petitions in to Clark, 430 people had signed to put the question up for vote this May.

When Clark completed her verification process, a total of 373 were certified, which was more than the amount needed.

Organizers needed 223 valid signatures, or 10 percent of the 2,234 resident freeholders in Chase County, to put the question on the ballot.

A resident freeholder is a person residing in Chase County who owns property.

