

Gritman outlines its plans for LHS



Omie Drawhorn, Daily News staff writer

Gritman Medical Center has big plans for the Latah Health Services facility on Palouse River Drive in Moscow. Latah County voters will determine Tuesday whether those plans are put into action. If the special measure is approved, a reversionary clause that restricts the facility's use will be removed and Gritman will purchase the building and the 6 acres it sits on for \$1. Gritman would then revamp the facility, with a primary focus on community wellness and education. The building also will include expanded adult day health and physical therapy centers. "Over the last three years or so we have explored the possibility of a wellness facility, but we haven't had enough space," said B.J. Swanson, chairwoman of Gritman's board of directors. Gritman passed on opportunities to purchase the Latah Health Services building in 1996 and 2002. "Because of the reversionary clause we couldn't borrow money," Swanson said. Gritman's purchase hinges on removal of the clause, which requires the facility to be used for health care purposes. Latah County Commissioner Jack Nelson said it wasn't legally possible to run an election for the sole purpose of removing the reversionary clause. "The way the statute reads, the voters have to approve the sale," he said. "When we decided to sell to a certain entity, it would have to go on the ballot again. It would require an election each time someone wanted to buy the facility." Swanson said if the measure passes, the 5,150-square-foot community wellness portion of the facility will incorporate classes, meeting rooms and dialysis services. The therapy pool would remain the cornerstone of the therapy portion of the building. An expanded adult day health facility, at just more than 11,000 square feet, will be located in the former assisted-living space. "At this point we needed to do something" about expanding adult day health, she said. Gritman officials have considered purchasing the site that currently houses its adult day health center on Palouse River Drive, which the hospital leases, or looking elsewhere for a permanent facility. The current adult day health facility is cramped with 38 clients. Gritman can accept more adult day health patients if it is able to purchase the Latah Health Services facility. Gritman has offered to lease the west wing of the building to Latah County to use for offices, but county commissioners have not said whether they will take Gritman up on the offer. "That wing is where most of the asbestos is, but I don't think it would be that



expensive to remove," Swanson said. Swanson said Gritman doesn't expect to make a profit from the lease to the county, only to repay its costs to renovate and operate that portion of the facility. The county has estimated \$100,000 in renovations are needed to the west wing, while Gritman's estimate is \$300,000. Swanson said the peaked roof with trusses on the western part of the building would accommodate the offices and the end section would make a good community room. The 17,000-square-foot upper-eastern portion of the building is vacant, but Swanson hopes it eventually will be leased to an assisted-living facility. "We have talked with three different companies," Swanson said. "The problem is the mix of patients." Housing private patients, as opposed to Medicaid patients, would be more workable, she said. Low-income assisted living "didn't pay the costs," Swanson said. The county didn't want to ask Latah County voters for a bond to subsidize Latah Health Services because it probably wouldn't pass, Swanson said. Swanson estimated total repairs for the property would cost between \$1 million and \$4 million. "We are very committed to this," she said. "This is about wellness. People that use the therapy pool say they would be in skilled nursing without it." Providing wellness information to the county as a whole also is important, Swanson said. "I'm looking forward to the vote," she said. "I feel that Gritman can make a very nice facility out of it. "I don't know of any other local entity with the resources to do it." The Latah Health Services facility has been closed since Dec. 30. The Latah Health Services Board of Directors decided to dissolve and end its partnership with St. Maries, Idaho-based Valley Vista Care Center after a long history of financial troubles. Omie Drawhorn can be reached at (208) 882-5561, ext. 234, or by e-mail at odrawhorn@dnews.com.

