



Chiefland hospital rumor persists

Story and Photo By Jeff M. Hardison
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CHIEFLAND -- A Chiefland resident approached the City Commission during its twice-monthly regular meeting on Monday night (May 23) asking that the city not give any of the \$1.5 million Community Development Block Grant Economic Development project money to a developer, except when it will benefit the city as it should.

Noel Desmond tells the City Commission what he found on the Internet in regard to Ameris failing in hospital business deals with cities.

Noel Desmond brought printouts of several articles during the past many years that showed Ameris Health Systems had issues with cities when it built hospitals in those cities, including closing two hospitals that ended employment for 300 people.

Laurie Copeland, a former grant writer with the city who is now in the city's financial department, told the City Commission that Suwannee River Community Hospital is not an Ameris project.

She said the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration is reviewing documents to determine if the Certificate Of Need is to be given to the newest developer of the possible hospital.

Copeland said the AHCA will have a determination if the CON is to be continued June 4.

After 10 years of stalling, and stories of dates for breaking ground and the like, few people believe hospital rumors any more.

Desmond said as far as the new water and sewer lines to be paid for by a CDBG for Economic Development from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, he wants the city to not give any spending power to the developer.

Desmond said, however, that he believes the area needs a hospital other than the ones in Gainesville, because that is such a long drive that many people have died on the way there. There was some discussion about both Shands and North Florida Regional Medical Center opening urgent care centers on the western end of Gainesville.

Chiefland Vice Mayor Betty Walker said she visited at least two hospitals Desmond spoke about in his verbal review of allegations about Ameris' institutions in other states. Walker was among the group from Chiefland that went on tours via airplanes to see existing Ameris hospitals.

City Commissioner Teresa Barron said she visited an Ameris hospital in Georgia too. City Commissioner Rollin Hudson pointed out that some of the information Desmond provided from the "Bloomberg Business Weekly" is not correct, because one story said Ameris has a hospital in Chiefland – and that never happened.

Walker said she has been doing whatever she could to help bring a hospital to the area. She, too, though is skeptical when a person makes claims about starting construction on a hospital.

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“I get very upset when Ameris comes in and Frank (Schupp) calls me,” Walker said, “and he tells me that we are going to build a hospital, and it never happens. We rode and we had a lot of Levy County support and then some.”

Walker mentioned that Dr. Robert Mount, a Chiefland dentist, Realtor Doug King and Levy County Commissioners all did everything in their power to support the proposition by Ameris.

The Tri-County Area put in \$60,000 to help Ameris fund the very first application for a Certificate Of Need.

“I say, ‘Oh God, are they coming to tell us something else about the hospital that is not true,” Walker she said when she saw Desmond wanted to talk about the possible future hospital in Chiefland.

The whole position Desmond wanted the city leaders to understand is that he did not trust any developer with the CDBG funds designated for the city’s use to build water and sewer lines.