

A program of last resort

Written by Deb Egenberger
Thursday, 07 January 2010 17:56 -

County's relief fund fills the gap for residents waiting on state, federal help.

LEXINGTON—Dawson County residents who find themselves without a source of income have several options for assistance.

The first stop is Nebraska Health and Human Services programs, said HHS representative Cindy Hasty.

The last, she said, is the county's relief fund.

Hasty appeared before the Dawson County commissioners on Thursday to help clear up confusion about how the relief fund works.

"We look at HHS programs first," she said, "such as Medicaid, AABD (Aid to the Aged, Blind and Disabled) and food stamps."

If a person in need has a disability, either mental or physical, Hasty said supplemental security income through Social Security is usually the answer.

"But the application and approval for SSI can take up to three years," she said.

The county relief fund is used to cover bills—particularly necessary medical care costs—until SSI is in place.

"It's a program of last resort for people who are basically unable to work," Hasty said.

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Commissioners' questions about the county relief fund and how it is administered came about due to a couple of large medical claims last year of more than \$30,000 each.

"We had a party with some astronomical medical bills," said county board chairman Roger Bauer. "We wondered if there was another avenue to cover those costs."

Hasty said recipients of county relief are between the ages of 19 and 64 and are generally unable to work due to disability.

"So we are dealing with the worst of the worst," Cozad commissioner P.J. Jacobson said.

Hasty explained that all recipients are screened and all HHS programs considered before county relief is used.

"It's frustrating to me because we're not doctors," Hasty said, pertaining to the client with high medical costs and others claiming disability. "We do the best we can to make the program run the way it's supposed to."

Commissioners budgeted \$200,000 of the general fund for county relief for the 2009-10 fiscal year.

In other action, county board members followed the recommendation of the planning and zoning commission to approve a special use permit issued to U.S. Cellular.

The cell phone company plans to build a 300-foot tower 3 miles east and a quarter-mile south of Sumner.

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Company officials say they prefer to build their own tower rather than lease use of a nearby Verizon Wireless tower.

In other business, commissioners:

- approved the following Extension board appointments: Vicky Peterson, District 1; Jan Stieb, District 2; David Boyd, District 3; Marti Fischer, District 4; Rod Wood, District 5.
- voted to pay \$501 to join the National Association of Counties which provides national lobbying and grant assistance to members.
- renewed the annual contract for engineering with Miller & Associates.
- learned the purchase has been complete for the new Dawson County Public Transit building at 605 Plum Creek Parkway. A claim will be submitted for reimbursement of the \$127,000 cost for the property from federal stimulus funds.