

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Hardin County Commissioners, following the public hearing held on April 23rd, would like to address several of the concerns that were raised regarding the closure of the Hardin Hills Health Center. The responses are in no particular order nor do they indicate that any one concern is more important than another.

The Commissioners would like to begin by thanking the employees and staff of Hardin Hills for the excellent care that they have given to the residents. The level of care was never a consideration in the decision to close the facility. The employees and staff are to be commended for the outstanding service and dedication they have shown to the residents.

Concerns have been expressed that the decision was made too quickly and efforts were not made to save the facility. In fact, the commissioners were consulting with legal counsel that specializes in nursing home law in an effort to sell the bed licenses to a private company with the intent of that company continuing to operate Hardin Hills by leasing the current building until a new facility could be built. Those talks were progressing when the report was received on March 20th that the fire pump could not be depended upon to operate to capacity in the event of a fire. At that time, a fire watch was mandated by the State of Ohio and was immediately implemented. Due to the failure of the fire pump, the leasing of the building could not go forward.

Efforts are continuing to be able to sell those bed licenses with a stipulation that they be used in a new facility in Hardin County. Due to requirements of the Ohio Revised Code and the Ohio Department of Health, there are strict guidelines that must be followed in the sale of these beds including the requirement that the bed licenses be sold by competitive bidding, the same as any other county asset.

The issue of numerous executive (closed) sessions was also raised. All of the executive sessions were held in compliance with the Ohio Revised Code governing the allowance of only certain discussions. Some of the sessions were to consider salary increases for employees and staff to remain competitive in the post-COVID labor environment. Others were during discussions concerning the sale of beds and or real estate at Hardin Hills including some with legal counsel.

The core of the decision to close the facility revolves around the fact that while Hardin Hills is licensed for up to 85 beds, only 78 were actually available for use due to space issues. Of these 78 beds, the break-even point of residents for the facility was in the low 60s. At the time of the decision to close, the resident census was in the low 50s, well below the break-even point. The facility was not able to be sustained at those census numbers

While there were several suggestions made to place a levy on the ballot, seek grants or ask for donations, these are not viable options in either the immediate or long term situation. Levies are a time-consuming process that can take months or even years to produce financial benefits. Grants are short-term, limited to very specific types of expenditures and are not sustainable. No health care facility should have an operation dependent on donations to maintain services.

Accusations have been made that the Commissioners have not maintained the Hardin Hills facility. There have been numerous repairs done to the building of the last few years. These have included new roofs, replacement of cooling units for the air conditioning system, numerous repairs to the elevator, repairs to the emergency generator and more. The fire pump was the latest issue. In 2022, a study was done to connect the building's sprinkler system to the City of Kenton water main that serves the building. At that time, it was determined, that while Kenton's water mains were adequate to supply the hydrant system around the building, the building sprinkler system exceeded the water pressure capacity in the city mains. For this reason the fire pump would have to remain part of the system. In addition, the existing sprinklers heads were nearing the 50 year threshold for serviceability and would need to be replaced in 2025. This study also found that, when installed many years ago, there were main and branch piping that had been installed contrary to the sprinkler drawings causing further flow issues. It was for these reasons, that the pump was not replaced at that time and other options were to be explored. These options could not be finalized before the recent pump failure notice.

Questions were asked about the county's American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds. There were ARPA funds received directly by Hardin Hills that were used for salaries, COVID supplies and other direct expenses by Hardin Hills. The ARPA funds received by the county have been used county wide for various county and local projects. Some of these ARPA funds were used for repairs at Hardin Hills and to help purchase 2 badly needed transport vans for residents. All of the ARPA funds have either been expended or committed to projects.

At the present time, there has been no decision made on the future of the Hardin Hills building or the property on which it is located. Our immediate concern is the safety of our residents and assisting them in locating another facility to which to move. Each resident, as they are in the process of moving, will have a Hardin Hills staff member assist them with packing as desired, taking an inventory of their belongings and medications and working with their family/care giver in making the move as comfortable as possible. A staff member will accompany the resident to their new facility, again do an inventory of belongs and medications and work with the staff of the receiving facility to make the resident comfortable.

While this is not an exhaustive listing of the concerns expressed at the public meeting, the Commissioners hope that these responses will aid the public in understanding the history and process involved in this very difficult decision.

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