

Orthopedic center at Kahle Park proposed

By Anne Knowles

MINDEN – Barton Health and Douglas County are in talks to locate an orthopedic center of excellence in Kahle Park.

Barton approached the county with the idea and this week the Douglas County Board of Commissioners approved a letter of intent allowing county personnel to explore a possible project in Stateline, according to Steve Mokrohisky, Douglas County manager.

Any deal would likely involve a long-term lease of the property and include county use of a Barton building for a library, senior services or some other public use, Mokrohisky told *Lake Tahoe News* after the inaugural Financial State of the County meeting on March 11 at the Carson Valley Inn in Minden.



Douglas County is considering Barton's proposal to build an orthopedic center at Kahle Park in Stateline.

For Barton, a central facility would consolidate four doctors'

offices and bring seven physicians into the same building with a surgery center, radiology, sports performance center and other services, said Jonathan Finnoff, a doctor of osteopathic medicine and the medical director of rehabilitation and sports medicine with Barton's Tahoe Center for Orthopedics.

"All different parties with a vested interest under one roof," Finnoff said, would enable the practice to integrate various programs and better consult with and refer patients to one another.

Barton looked at 17 sites on the South Shore, but found no existing structures that could accommodate their plans, according to Chris Proctor, director of the Tahoe Center for Orthopedics.

Barton is still considering several sites, but if Kahle Park worked out, the health facility would be built near the existing parking garage and all other structures already in the park would remain. Initial concept designs have been rendered for partners and potential investors, but Proctor cautioned that it's early in the process and many factors, such as site and cost, will determine the final plan.

If all goes to plan, Barton is expecting to have the new center completed in two years.

The possible Barton deal was talked about at the county meeting as part of Douglas County's plans to cut costs and increase revenue in order to deal with a lingering \$3 million budget deficit.

"If we fix it one year at a time, we won't fix it structurally," Mokrohisky said during his presentation to about 100 attendees.

To do that, the county now is using priority-based budgeting. Instead of instituting across the board cuts to meet goals, said Mokrohisky, the county is reassessing what it spends on

everything and reallocating money where it is most needed while reducing overall costs.

For example, the county decided its permit requirement for home-based businesses was a waste of staff time and is now spending some of that money on better enforcement of vacation home rentals, mostly at Lake Tahoe.

It is also taking some property tax money to help pay the annual \$4 million road maintenance tab.

The county says it wants to work with and support businesses wherever possible. The potential Barton deal may be the most ambitious, but the county is also making zoning changes and reviewing sign ordinances to better accommodate businesses. And in a first, it filed an amicus brief in support of Sierra Colina, the proposed housing development in Stateline that is being sued by the League to Save Lake Tahoe.

The county is also working with other area municipalities to generate revenue and outsource services. Douglas County has added \$330,000 to its general fund by providing geographical information services to Carson City and Storey and Lyon counties, and saves about \$50,000 a year contracting with Carson City to supply signal light maintenance.

Since 2008, about 60 staff positions in the county have been eliminated and in 2011 salaries were reduced 5 percent. Since 2010, employees have absorbed all of the annual 10 percent increases in health insurance costs.

The county's projected budget for 2013-14 is \$39.9 million, about \$1 million above its projected revenues of \$38.9 million.