

County authorizes using hotels for rooms during pandemic

April 10, 2020



The Del Norte County Board of Supervisors cleared the way April 6 for its administration to contract out local hotels to house patients and health care workers needing to be isolated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The board unanimously approved a resolution giving the Department of Health and Human Services jurisdiction to lease local hotel rooms.

Before the move, County Administrative Officer Jay Sarina could only enter into independent contracts of up to \$50,000 during an emergency.

A county staff report pointed out, for example, renting out 100 rooms at a time at \$50 per night would deplete the amount authorized after just 10 days.

The resolution authorizes Sarina an expenditure of between \$50,000 to \$100,000 to contract with local hotels during the COVID-19 emergency only. However, the staff report did not specify the terms of the contracts

nor the number and duration of hotels needed.

County Public Health Officer Dr. Warren Rehwaldt clarified the two needs for the hotel rooms for the supervisors, including for quarantining and isolation and for social distancing.

He said the health department is looking at providing a space for those who are infected and need to isolate or those who were infected and are recovering.

Rehwaldt outlined several examples, including people who need to isolate because they are sick, yet are not sick enough to need to go to the hospital, yet have other high-risk people living at home.

“You don’t want to send sick people home if there is someone there who likely will end up in the hospital, especially in a severe condition,” Rehwaldt said. “Another example would be someone who has been in the hospital, needs a place to convalesce while they recover. They don’t need to be in the hospital anymore, but there is somebody in their home who is ill, say an elderly couple. Someone gets sick, is admitted to the hospital, spends a few days there, is ready to go home, but their spouse is uninfected at home. We don’t want to send them home right away to that environment and have them basically exchange beds and send that spouse right back to the hospital.”

The second need for rooms, he said, was to keep people isolated so they don’t become infected.

“The best example of the second one would be health care workers, someone working at the hospital or someone at their home becomes ill. They don’t want to risk going home and becoming sick and then not being able to work. So, they need a temporary housing alone while the family member recovers from the illness,” Rehwaldt said.

He added the health department is also trying to lay the groundwork to assist the hospital by providing some oxygen support for their patients as they exit.

“They can actually continue on oxygen in the hotel room. If everything goes as planned, we should have that capacity,” Rehwaldt said.

According to the staff report, the hotel rooms could also provide refuge for the homeless who don’t have a “no-congregate living” option available.