

# Regional district concerned about hospital funding

By Melanie Robinson

FORT ST. JOHN – The new hospital proposed for the city of Fort St. John was a topic of debate at last week’s Peace River Regional District (PRRD) meeting.

It wasn’t because directors don’t want the project to go forward, but because they are looking for more information before they commit to funding that could reach as much as \$98 million.

Northern Health requested 40 per cent of the funding for the hospital from the hospital district without giving a cost estimate of the project which left a number of directors frustrated with a lot of questions going unanswered.

“I don’t believe that we should be looking for funding before we have an approximate cost of the total project knowing full well that it can change on a yearly basis,” said Area E director Tim Caton. “The further out we go the less likely we’re going to hit the nail on the head.”

“But if it didn’t happen here, we’re probably looking at 25 years before it would come back here,” said Mayor Jim Eglinski.

Following a lengthy discussion, the board passed the motion to approve the 40 per cent funding, to a maximum of \$98 million, but under stipulations that included updates on plans for Peace River Haven and Pouce Coupe Care homes; direction on the Chetwynd assisted living project; and maximum funding dollars for hospital equipment.

Only two directors, Tumbler Ridge Mayor Mike Caisley and Caton, voted against the motion.

“I don’t feel that the regional board had adequate information presented to it today to make a viable decision on how much we were going to contribute to the total project,” said Caton, who clarified he wasn’t voting against the need for a hospital.

“We’re being asked to contribute 40 per

cent or \$100 million. That’s quite a tax implication for our local residents over a 27-year payback period. What happens with any other facilities in our area that need capital upgrades? Are they going to be at a standstill? Or are our taxpayers going to be requested to pay even more tax over the next few years?”

Eglinski, who voted in favor of the motion, admits there is still a lot of work to be done by Northern Health and the other two government agencies involved with the project.

“I think more information could have come forward to all of us,” he said. “I believe some of the concerns passed by some fellow directors were legitimate concerns

and I’m hoping that message does go to Northern Health. But I think the right decision was made today to support the endeavour.”



Brenda Piper photo

Lucy Brain with daughter Emily makes a donation to Fort St. John Hospital Foundation executive director Janice Isberg at the Have A Heart Radiothon at Safeway sponsored by Astral Media. Fort St. John donated \$26,000, for a radiant resuscitation warmer for newborns, just shy of their \$30,000 goal. Dawson Creek raised \$51,500 in their radiothon. They needed, and got, \$30,000 for an infant isolett. FEB 20, 2008



## HOSPITAL HELP

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Contributed photo

Fort St. John Hospital Auxiliary Society members, Maureen Kramer and Lil Turchanski install one of 15 new flat-screened TVs for the Med Surgery wing in the Fort St. John Hospital and Health Center as patient, Ray Archambeault, looks on. Cost is approximately \$14,000.

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