

COP makes offer for Health

By Abby Proch
Staff writer

Christian Outreach grew closer to its goal of moving into the former health department building when the Isle of Wight Board of Supervisors agreed to remove it from its list of properties to sell.

The motion to exclude the former health department office, located on Grace Street in Smithfield, came after Christian Outreach showed interest in the building as its new headquarters.

The Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the hiring of Divaris Real Estate of Newport News to sell surplus county properties, except the health department building, that were not sold during a sealed bid process this summer.

Properties for sale include the Stoup property, which is assessed at \$841,100 but was purchased in 2008 for nearly \$1 million.

County officials hope to receive \$1.2 million for the sale of eight properties.

At first, not all supervisors were on board with the idea to exclude the health department building.

Chairman Al Casteen was the lone opponent, but later changed his mind to make the vote unanimous.

"It would be foolish to list this if we have a proposal out there at this time," said JoAnne Hall, Hardy supervisor.

Christian Outreach has proposed to purchase the property for \$75,000, according to Don Robertson, county spokesperson.

Christian Outreach is a non-profit community organization that helps the county's poorest residents with a range of services including medical, dental and health care as well as food and housing repairs.

Casteen initially dis-



Staff Photo by Abby Proch

Christian Outreach wants to convert the former Health Department building to a storage, distribution and resource facility.

agreed with Hall about extending that opportunity to Christian Outreach, saying, "I feel like we have to honor (the RFP)."

Hall said the Board could ask Divaris whether they would be amendable to accepting the contract without the health department building.

"There is nothing that prevents you from withdrawing certain parcels from that process," said county attorney Mark Popovich, adding that it may make the whole deal with Divaris fall through.

Hall said Christian Outreach provides an "invaluable service to the county" and that the building had been for sale for months.

In 2011, the group provided dental assistance to 51 people, prescription assistance to 35 people, medical transport to five people, fuel assistance for 424 people and home repairs for 50 homes, said Charlie Seitz, president of Christian Outreach.

Every dollar donated results in \$5.50 in benefits, said Seitz.

The Grace Street location would double the

group's operating space and better help the group support the community, he said.

"None of this would be possible to handle without an operating facility," he said.

Currently, Christian Outreach operates out of a 3,600 square foot storage unit at a county industrial park near Benn's Church. It has no heat or air conditioning, according to Wayne Farmer, who spoke in support of Christian Outreach obtaining the Grace Street property. It has also no bathrooms or running water, said Seitz in an interview Monday.

Casteen said he was concerned that upsetting Divaris would leave the county without a broker at all.

County staff received two proposals, one from Divaris and another from KBL Real Estate Services of Suffolk.

Casteen's assertion that altering the deal would cause the county's credibility to be "shot" was met by shouts of "Come on!" from the audience.

Casteen later clarified

his stance in an e-mail.

Casteen said his opposition to removing the health department building from the RFP had nothing to do

The Smithfield Times - Wed., Oct. 24, 2012 - Page 5

building

with Christian Outreach, but more to do with collecting revenue to fund the county's budget.

"Attempts to sell (the properties) by the county failed rather flatly yet the county budget expects to sell at least half the properties at the assessed values in order to get the expected revenues this fiscal year.

"I believe the county finances will work out even if no real estate is sold but I also believe the county should make a responsible effort to sell as many of the excess properties as possible since said sales were included as revenue in the operating budget," wrote Casteen.

At the meeting, Hall also introduced the option of a long-term, "minimum cost" lease to Christian Outreach, in lieu of selling it the group.

Seitz later said Christian Outreach would be amenable to the rental option if it could alter the interior of the building to make more room for its food program and furniture and appliance storage area.

Seitz said Christian Outreach tried to rent the building in 2011 but withdrew its offer after he said the county wouldn't permit structural changes.

"The building is actually in a tremendous location," Seitz said. "It would serve our clients well at that location. But we realize it will take quite of bit of monies to rehab it to where it can be utilized," he said.

Christian Outreach's proposal will go before the Building and Grounds Committee, but a date has not been determined, said Robertson.