

Corrections site near deal

CCCS lone proposal for START facility near Anaconda

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ANACONDA — Plans for a 144-bed corrections facility just east of Anaconda are looking promising for a Butte-based organization.

The state Department of Corrections has eliminated a Hardin facility from consideration for a contract to run the START Program, leaving Community, Counseling and Correctional Services of Butte the lone contender.

"The scoring committee met on Monday and concluded in the case of Hardin they failed to respond sufficiently in key categories and as a result their response was rejected," said Bob Anez, communications director for the DOC. "That leaves CCCS as the lone proposer to run the START facility." The department and CCCS will now begin negotiations, specifically with regard to how much the organization is proposing to charge per prisoner, per day.

"It's not a done deal," Anez said. "We're hoping to get that down from where it is." The prospects warrant cautious optimism, CCCS executive director Mike Thatcher said Thursday.

"It's promising; we have made the next step into the best-final offer discussion options," he said. "I'm grateful for all of the support out of the Anaconda Community." The START Program is for male felony offenders who have violated the terms of their probations. Through a state contract, CCCS currently runs the program on the Montana State Hospital at Warm Springs Campus. It is proposing to build a new \$13.5 million facility on ARCO land at Montana Highways 48 and 243.

The organization employs 37 people at the existing facility, and has said the new proposal would likely mean more jobs.

Although Two Rivers proposed to use an existing Hardin facility, it ultimately failed to provide sufficient information in several areas, Anez said.

"The areas we still had concerns with was their financial stability; they've had problems making their bond payments because they haven't been able to find any customers for the facility," Anez said. "We didn't want to get into a contract with an organization we couldn't be sure was financially stable." Also, the DOC had concerns about Two Rivers' ability to staff and open the facility within 60 days and other issues.

But questions still remain about CCCS proposed costs for the new facility. Currently, the organization is proposing to charge DOC \$117 per prisoner, per day; the department doesn't want to pay that much.

"We understood it was going to be more expensive than where they are now," Anez said. "If they're going to build a new building it makes sense there is going to be some additional costs. But \$117 was more than we were hoping for." The negotiations are expected to take place over the next few weeks.

"Our goal is still to get this contract awarded before the end of the year, and the sooner the better," Anez said.

