

Summit Pacific may build new clinic in McCleary

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Steven Friederich | The Vidette Flowers are in bloom outside of the old Mark Reed Hospital, which still serves as home to the McCleary clinic.

By Steven Friederich

The Vidette

Administrators at Summit Pacific Medical Center are trying to figure out whether it may make sense to build a brand new health clinic in McCleary or renovate the old, existing one in the former Mark Reed Hospital.

Chief Financial Officer Will Callicoat reports that despite opening the new hospital in Elma, people of McCleary are still using the clinic. In fact, Callicoat's findings suggest that an additional health provider may be needed in McCleary by 2018 after a doctor will likely retire. There are five providers in McCleary today, accounting for about the equivalent of three full-time providers — two doctors and three nurse practitioners that split their time between other locations. All are currently accepting patients and accept Medicare and Medicaid.

With a population of about 3,200, more than 16 percent of the population is over the age of 65, the most frequent users of the health care system; compared to 14 percent statewide, the data shows.

Despite leaving the old Mark Reed Hospital in McCleary, use of the hospital's clinic continues.

"We have a perfect mix of providers in McCleary, while providing great access," Summit Pacific CEO Renée Jensen said. "We are really in the sweet spot. ... But the physical environment of the clinic is really, really, poor. We're doing the best we can by putting a bit of paint on it, using leftover vinyl on it to cover up places where the duct tape is holding the carpet together, but it really is time to look at what we should do about a replacement clinic."

Jensen notes it's part of the hospital district's long-term strategic plan.

"The time has come," Jensen said. "Based on the market data, we can assume we will have some pick up of clients with a replacement clinic. It actually might pull some patients from Elma back to McCleary, as well."

Jensen says that the hospital district has about 60 percent of the current market share in McCleary. In an area, which is so close to Olympia, "that is a very, very strong market share," Jensen said.

What's interesting, however, is that two-thirds of the residents that are using the hospital's facilities are choosing to travel to the new hospital in Elma, rather than use the existing clinic just a few blocks from their homes at the old hospital.

Hospital Commissioner Amy Thomason noted that it could be a case of the newness of Summit Pacific — and may bolster the cause to do renovations or build a new facility in McCleary.

Jensen says that administrators will be working with a potential design builder to see what a new clinic could cost, look like — and where it could go. Hospital officials are considering abandoning the old hospital building entirely. One idea is to build a new clinic closer to the center of town so it's more accessible to the Transit station.

"We're estimating spending about \$800,000 to build a clinic that would support about four providers and once we get our heads around what it would look like, ... we would have to figure out the details," Jensen said.

Another idea is to build a bit larger medical facility to support doctor offices' medical practices, not just a clinic, Jensen said.

"We're in the early brainstorming phase," Jensen said.

Since the hospital closed in February of last year, the bulk of the building has sat unused. The hospital had been trying to recruit other medical-type users to potentially located there — acupuncturists, chiropractors, that sort of thing. There hasn't been any takers. In March, a team from Behavioral Health Resources toured the facility to see if it might make sense for offices for them; BHR has an office in Elma, currently.

Hospital District Commissioner Gary Thumser recommended getting the old hospital on the commercial real estate market right away.

Hospital District Commission Chairman Drew Hooper said that everything is really up in the air.

"There is a need for providers in McCleary and we know that is very important for us to be there," Hooper said in a phone interview. "I think we need to look at opportunities to get a new facility and, if so, that would bring up questions as to what we would we do with the old one. There's an opportunity of providing some of the newness back to McCleary would override doing something with the old building. But, in a way, we don't want property just sitting, either. The whole thing is challenging to determine what is best for the community of McCleary and what's best for the district and how do we provide a high level of care in a way that will still remain operationally sound?"