

West Maui hospital moves closer to breaking ground

By COLLEEN UECHI

LAHAINA - With approval for the site plan in hand and many procedural hurdles already cleared, the physical work on West Maui's long-awaited hospital is soon to begin.

Within the next three to four months, developer Newport Hospital Corp. plans to start grading the uneven, 14.9-acre property in Kaanapali, and construction of hospital facilities will begin shortly thereafter, Newport President Brian Hoyle announced Thursday at a West Maui Taxpayers Association meeting. Completion is scheduled for the end of 2017.

"This is the best news we ever had," said Joe Pluta, association vice president and treasurer. "We did all the impossible things. All that's left is the possible things."

Right now, Newport and the West Maui Hospital Foundation, the nonprofit entity that will run the hospital, have chosen a contractor, the Maui branch of California-based F&H Construction, Hoyle said. He added that plans have been submitted to the county for grading and infrastructure installation.

"The initial push was just to get the site graded," Hoyle said. "We have (all the infrastructure) available. We just have to bring it from different points to get it right to our site."

The \$70-million West Maui Hospital and Medical Center will be situated on Kakaalaneo Road, just below the Kaanapali Coffee Farms Development, according to the hospital's website. Plans include a 25-bed critical access hospital with a 24-hour emergency room, three operating rooms, a radiology department and 24-hour pharmacy and laboratory. A 40-bed skilled nursing facility, 40-unit assisted living facility, medical office building and freestanding clinic also will be built on campus. There are plans to add a drug and alcohol rehab facility later.

"You want a continuum of care . . . from acute care to a skilled nursing to an assisted living, all within literally 100 feet," Hoyle said. "Having been in health care my entire life, this is the model of the future."

Community members who've waited years for a facility said they don't mind waiting a little longer. One of them, 19-year Lahaina resident Peggy Robertson, said that she drove 50 miles a day back and forth to Wailuku for almost a month last year while her late husband was receiving care at Maui Memorial Medical Center.

"I'm glad (West Maui) will be having 40 beds for assisted living. That's really important," she said. "There's got to be a place to go when people are well enough to get out of the hospital but still can't go home."

The hospital has been a dream of the community's for nearly 20 years, Pluta said, adding that there was lots of local support but no organization willing to fund it initially.

"They were told that the State of Hawaii would absolutely not ever give them or anyone a certificate of need to compete against Maui Memorial," Pluta said. "(Brian Hoyle) is the first guy that said, 'OK . . . I believe in you, and I'll give you the check.' "

Hoyle's company invested more than a million dollars into the initial process, Pluta said, and the community put up around \$800,000. The board of directors of the West Maui Taxpayers Association worked with consultants to write the certificate of need themselves, and in 2009, the state approved it.

After the project earned unanimous approval from both the Maui Planning Commission in 2014 and from the County Council Land Use Commission last March, the full council put the final stamp of approval on community plan and zoning changes in May.

It will be the first hospital built in Hawaii in 20 years, Hoyle said. He described it as "a full service hospital" tailored to a rural community model.

"For this community, look at the hospital as a first responder," he said. "In the event that you have a critical accident or need for critical care or acute care, we're there."

Maui Memorial does more invasive operations, like cardiac surgery or organ transplants, he explained.

West Maui Hospital expects to employ about 10 to 15 physicians, Hoyle said. Hoyle said the hospital will work with Maui medical groups, as well as independent and retired physicians, to fill staffing needs. He added that the hospital "would love to establish a rural doctor internship program" for local medical students.

"You can build a life here," Hoyle said. "Many people have."

At the same meeting Thursday, state Rep. Angus McKelvey announced that Gov. David Ige signed an agreement that transferred management of three quasi-public Maui County hospitals to private health care provider Kaiser Permanente. Hoyle said that while he's not yet sure how this could affect operations between Maui Memorial and West Maui Hospital, the two hospitals will continue to work together closely.

"We want to find ways to work with (Kaiser) and the other providers in the community," he said. "That's something we have to figure into our plan."

For more information on the hospital, visit wmhamc.com.

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