

LHC, Watson family finalize land transfer

20 acres donated and 10 acres purchased

By Camden Easterling
Enterprise Staff Writer

Livingston HealthCare has finalized the acceptance of 20 acres of donated land and purchased an additional 10 acres from a local family for the organization's planned new medical campus.

LHC, a nonprofit group that operates local medical facilities such as Livingston Memorial Hospital and Park Clinic, plans to build a new hospital on Livingston's east end. The campus will replace LHC's current hospital on South 13th Street. The project also would consolidate at the new location various LHC-affiliated offices now spread throughout town.

The organization is in the process of applying to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for help with funding the projected \$38.5 million in costs for the new campus. Applying for USDA financing includes submitting plans for where the campus would be located.

LHC in recent weeks worked with Ted and Georgann Watson of Livingston to complete a land donation and a separate land sale of property to be used for the new campus, LHC Community Development Director Sandi Marlowe said this week.

Land donation

Part of the USDA application process is to address the proposed location. The site itself incorporates results from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's most recent flood plain study.

In 2007, Ted and Georgann Watson of Livingston offered to donate 20 acres of land for LHC to use as the group's site for a new hospital and medical campus. The land is east of the bridge over the Yellowstone River that is near the

old KPRK radio station and south of U.S. Highway 89/10. The Watsons waited until LHC was further along in its planning process to complete the land donation, Marlowe said.

The transaction was finalized last week. The Watsons donated the land jointly to both LHC and Billings Clinic Foundation, a nonprofit organization that raises money for Billings Clinic.

LHC and Billings Clinic are in the process of formalizing an agreement that would expand on their existing relationship. The two groups have had a management affiliation since 2002, meaning LHC can draw on Billings Clinic for management consulting as it needs to, Marlowe said.

The land the Watsons made available for the new medical campus previously was part of the Myers and Watson Ranch.

"Both Georgann and I feel very fortunate that we can contribute to the future of health care for the Park County community in this way," Ted Watson said in a statement he provided to LHC. "Our goal is to help bring this new facility to our community as soon as possible."

Land purchase

LHC originally planned to locate the campus on 20 acres that abutted U.S. Highway 89/10.

However, a portion of that acreage is in the 500-year flood plain.

A FEMA flood map completed this year showed a section of the 500-year flood plain ran through the area planned for the hospital building, Marlowe said. In order to consider funding the project, USDA required the structure be repositioned to avoid interference with the 500-year flood plain, she said.

Avoiding the 500-year flood plain required moving the proposed site south. LHC talked with the Watsons about moving their 20-acre donation in that direction and allowing the organization to purchase the resulting 10 acres that would be closest to the highway.

LHC, from Page 1

"They were very gracious to donate that," Marlowe said of the 20-acre parcel. "And they were very gracious in moving the boundary lines to accommodate our needs and USDA."

LHC paid \$299,000 for the 10-acre piece. The funding came from money donated to the Livingston HealthCare Foundation for the purpose of acquiring land for a new campus, Marlowe said. The foundation is a nonprofit entity that raises money for LHC. Marlowe said she did not yet have an estimate for the value of the donated 20-acre parcel.

The sale closed Dec. 1. Guardian Title Co. of Livingston donated the fees to cover processing the transaction.

While the total 30 acres is a larger property than LHC

originally planned on, having the extra land "gives us a lot of opportunity for a long-term home with lots of growth," Marlowe said.

Construction and Billings Clinic

While LHC hopes to break ground in mid-2011, a construction timeline will be based on receiving funding approval and formalizing the proposed relationship with Billings Clinic.

LHC has not yet determined all the details with Billings Clinic. Once LHC and Billings Clinic officials finalize the plan for working together, LHC will present the proposal to its members for a vote on details of the relationship.

LHC is a member organization open to anyone who pays an annual \$10 fee. Members

participate in the organization's leadership and direction by voting on various issues.

Members will vote whether to approve revised corporate documents, such as bylaws and articles of incorporation, related to the Billings Clinic agreement, Marlowe said.

"Those documents will delineate the specific details of how Livingston HealthCare and Billings Clinic will work together," Marlowe said.

Part of the USDA application process includes providing information about the proposed relationship with Billings Clinic. LHC hopes to finish submitting the application in January and in the same month start giving details about the relationship to LHC voters, she said. A vote on the matter is not yet scheduled.