

RISE



Billings Clinic, Livingston HealthCare reach accord

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It took three years, but an agreement has been reached on an affiliation between Billings Clinic and Livingston HealthCare.

Although final approval of a host of details must be gained from Livingston HealthCare's governing 144-member association and the Billings Clinic Board of Directors, they are expected to be forthcoming in the next several months, according to Livingston HealthCare spokeswoman Sandi Marlowe.

"What we have are the prenuptials; the marriage will come later," said Billings Clinic Foundation President Jim Duncan Wednesday morning.

The affiliation clears the way for construction of a \$37.5 million medical campus on property donated more than a year ago by the Ted Watson family, on land recently annexed by Livingston just east of the Yellowstone River bridge at the KPRK radio station.

Livingston HealthCare has far outgrown the Livingston Memorial Hospital campus and is now in 18 different buildings and even more storage units across the city, Marlowe said.

The hospital itself, HealthCare CEO Sam Pleshar has stated, is more than 50 years old and is "just too small."

It is expected that a fundraising campaign will soon begin in the Livingston area that will raise about \$5 million toward the new facility, said Marlowe.

But with the bond market taking an unhealthy downward turn and the difficulty of getting bond insurance, Billings Clinic's expected \$32.5 million in financing for the new Livingston hospital is

on hold for now, Marlowe said Wednesday.

"We are just going to have to wait for the bond markets to look better, although we do see labor and constructions costs coming down somewhat," she said.

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Once funding is attained and ground broken on the new 116,000-square foot hospital and medical arts center, the construction phase would take about two years, Marlowe said.

"We think this is a very significant opportunity for our community," said Livingston HealthCare Board Chairwoman Michelle Becker. "All across the country, small, not-for-profit community hospitals are collaborating with larger, not-for-profit health systems to ensure their long-term viability and to increase the quality and scope of services available to the communities they serve."

One of the stumbling blocks to an agreement, it has been reported, has been the wording of an "opt out" clause that would allow Livingston HealthCare to end the agreement but still retain possession of the new facility.

The clause included a long list of criteria to be followed in the event the local board of directors believed it would be in its best interest to end the agreement.

The clause was finally worked out and is now part of the agreement, Marlowe said.