

***By Amy Sylvestri***

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The City Council voted Monday night to create a plan to give \$1 million annually for at least the next three years to the county to help keep San Leandro Hospital running with an emergency room.

The money will go to the Alameda County Medical Center (ACMC), which hopes to run the hospital with money from San Leandro, the Eden Township Healthcare District (ETHD), and county and federal funds.

ETHD is also in the early stages of planning a parcel tax to fund the hospital, which would go on a special ballot next year.

ACMC CEO Lassiter Wright told the City Council that joining a group of other local hospitals is the only way “stand alone” facilities can survive in the current health care climate.

Wright also said that the county would be the biggest financial stakeholder in the hospital and that he “wouldn’t be here” if he didn’t think having San Leandro Hospital join ACMC would benefit the city and the county and be financially successful.

County Supervisor Wilma Chan also spoke at the meeting, telling the council that helping the hospital join the ACMC would be a “win-win” for the county.

Under the current plan, the hospital would operate as is for at least three years and then go to a “hybrid” system and replace some acute care beds with rehabilitation services, but always keep the emergency room and ICU open.

“Rehab is a money-maker,” said Chan. “The hospital could remain open indefinitely.”

Sutter Health had wanted to convert the hospital to a rehabilitation-based facility, which caused a lot of public outcry, but the difference with the hybrid model would be that the emergency room would remain open.

The hospital is currently owned by Sutter Health, which has no obligation to go along with the ACMC plan. Councilwoman Ursula Reed expressed concern that all these plans would be for nothing if Sutter chooses not to play ball.

Wright said that he understands that concern, but believes Sutter will go along with the deal.

“Your radar that is going off is probably an appropriate reaction,” Wright told Reed. “But I believe there is a real interest from Sutter in finding a solution.”

The council approved the \$1 million annual funding, 6-1, with Councilman Tom Dugloch dissenting, citing the possibility of Sutter’s refusal as the reason for voting no.

Sutter asked the ACMC for an offer by Nov. 7, something that Council members Diana Souza and Pauline Cutter said felt rushed, but both voted in favor of giving the money to the county.

The money the city has pledged would be contingent on Sutter's agreement, so no money would change hands if the deal falls through.

Over a dozen public speakers took the microphone, mostly doctors and nurses, and each in favor of any plan that would keep the San Leandro Hospital running with an emergency room.

Mayor Stephen Cassidy called the city's payment "like an insurance policy" to keep health care options open in the city.