By Amy Sylvestri

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A plan to keep the emergency room open at San Leandro Hospital appears to have fallen apart, once again leaving the future of the hospital in limbo.

San Leandro Hospital is owned by Sutter Health, which doesn't want to continue emergency room services at the hospital. The Eden Township Healthcare District (ETHD), Alameda

County, and the City of San Leandro developed a plan to try to lease the hospital from Sutter and operate it as part of the Alameda County Medical Center (ACMC).

Under that plan, the hospital would have functioned with an emergency room and also be used as a rehabilitation facility – what the ACMC calls a "hybrid" model.

To facilitate the hybrid plan, San Leandro pledged $3 million over the next three years, as did the county and ETHD would've given $700,000 over two years.

But in early January, ACMC CEO Wright Lassiter wrote a letter to County Supervisor Wilma Chan and San Leandro Mayor Stephen Cassidy that called negotiations between the ACMC and Sutter "stalled."

"At present, I am not hopeful that any agreement will be reached," wrote Lassiter. "The reasons for the current status are varied and the NDA (non disclosure agreement) limits public discussion."

But while Chan, Cassidy, and the ACMC seem to believe that the deal is over, Sutter says they have made no decisions and are keeping all of their options open.

In a letter dated Dec. 20 to Chan and Cassidy from Sutter's vice president Florence DiBenedetto and regional president David Brandley, Sutter said they received no "hybrid" offer from the ACMC. They added that Sutter has lost money by maintaining San Leandro Hospital as an acute care facility longer than they were contractually obligated to do so, while waiting for the other parties to make their offers.

"The last I heard, we are still looking at everything that is on the table," said Sutter spokeswoman Stacey Wells. She added that she knows the process that they've been going through is lengthy and can be frustrating, but no decisions have been made.

For now, no new plans to try to keep the emergency room open are on the horizon, Cassidy said, but the city and county hasn't given up the fight.

"Sutter says it's losing money and we acted in good faith and proposed what we thought was a win-win idea," said Cassidy. "We are now back to where we were before – the future of the hospital is in doubt. But the situation is fluid."

If Sutter wants to close the emergency room at San Leandro Hospital, they must announce their intent to the county. The county then has 90 days to hold a hearing to appeal to the State Department of Healthcare Services, which could prevent the closure.

CAPTION: The future of San Leandro Hospital is still up in the air as the city and county try to work out a deal with Sutter.

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