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HOSPITAL FINANCING OK'D

\$18 million outlay will be Houston's largest construction project ever



Construction of a new hospital building that would house much of the institution's operation will result on the TCMH campus. Older portions of the existing building also will be revamped. The total outlay is about \$18 million. (Rendering by H Design Group, LLC)

New facility, major renovations included in plan

The federal government announced Monday that Texas County Memorial Hospital will receive an \$18 million low-interest loan that will result in a new core institution and extensive remodeling to the existing building.

The funding — from the Economic Recovery Act passed to stimulate the economy — will result in the largest construction project ever completed in Houston. News of the award came in the form of a news release and telephone call from U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., and caps a three-year effort to obtain financing in an upside-down credit market.

Wes Murray, chief executive officer of Texas County Memorial Hospital, told the institution's employees the announcement was "huge" for the hospital and county.

Much of the hospital's operation will be housed in a new 58,000 square foot addition situated northeast of the existing building. A new, larger emergency department and private medical surgical patient rooms are included in the project, which also calls for remodeling, renovation and even relocation of several hospital departments.

The green light from U.S. Rural Development comes after an exhaustive financial application process that included the hospital administration and its accounting firm, BKD, LLC, in Springfield.

"With these funds, we can build a facility that can be used by the residents of this county 50 years from now," Murray said. "Two to three generations of Texas County residents will be proud to call TCMH their hospital, and they will be able to use it to meet their

primary care needs."

The TCMH board of directors approved the project in 2007. A year later, the financial markets descended into turmoil not seen since the Great Depression. The collapse made traditional bond financing unfeasible after bids were sought. The project got new life last year when the U.S. Department of Agriculture expressed an interest in assisting. Since that time, the stimulus package included funds aimed at healthcare facilities.

Those monies are expected to include an interest rate no higher than 4 percent and as low as 3.75 percent.

"Our purpose is to take care of the patients of Texas County, and most of our patient care areas are extremely outdated and in need of major remodeling," Murray explained. "This funding will allow the hospital to expand our facilities to meet the needs of patients in the 21st century."

Dr. Charles Mueller, chief of staff and general surgeon at TCMH, described being "really excited" when he heard that the expansion funding had finally come through.

"This is a great opportunity for us to advance healthcare in Texas County," Mueller said. "Our patients deserve the best, and we will be able to provide it to them."

The hospital's emergency department was the impe-

tus behind the entire expansion project, as the hospital looked at renovating and increasing the size of the emergency room before looking at the whole effort. With the expansion, the emergency department of the hospital will move to the front of the hospital.

Dr. Jeff Kerr, emergency room medical director and physician, echoed comments that the community served by TCMH deserves the new expansion.

"The TCMH mission of staying in the forefront of medical technology with dedicated medical providers remains strong," Kerr explained. "This expansion will allow us to provide the technology and efficiencies needed to take us into the future."

Kerr noted that the expansion of the emergency department will provide full accessibility to the range of services available to patients through the department.

TCMH contacted HMN Architects in Springfield, the firm that assisted the hospital in designing the original expansion plans, and HMN will help the institution tweak them as needed.

"We have a different set of physicians that bring specialties and skill sets that we need to adapt to with our expansion," Murray said.

TCMH will also look at how healthcare reform will affect the proposed expansion.

See TCMH, Page A3



Murray

TCMH CONSTRUCTION, EXPANSION PROJECT

• A \$18 million USDA loan will pay for the project on the TCMH campus.

• A new, larger emergency department and private medical surgical patient rooms are included.

• Renovations also are planned to the current structure, including the relocation of several departments.

• The project is expected to help in physician recruitment efforts.

'A great day'

Wes Murray, TCMH's CEO since 2002, gathered managers and later employees Monday afternoon to tell the secret he had known since Friday: After nearly exhausting options at the federal level, there was good news to report finally.

"I think they are pleased. They know what this day means to the hospital, residents and our county," Murray said after explaining the hospital had secured federal funding...finally.

"It's been a great day," he said later.

Leaders: Good news for region's economy

U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill applauded the announcement that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Development program will provide approximately \$18 million in low-interest government loan funding for the Texas County Memorial Hospital.

Earlier this year, the hospital was notified that the funds it had applied for would no longer be available to applications. McCaskill advocated for the USDA to give the hospital the opportunity to apply for other fund-

ing through the agency. The loan announced Monday is coming from unused Rural Development funds and is not an additional appropriation.



McCaskill

After the announcement, McCaskill made the following statement to the *Herald*:

"Houston is my hometown, and I'm so pleased to hear that USDA has announced they will be able to fund the Texas County hospital project. I fought hard to help the Texas County Memorial Hospital

project receive full consideration when I learned the money they needed was no longer available, but they earned this money on the merits of the project and its importance in the region. By expanding and renovating the facility, the hospital will be able to provide better healthcare services to more people while creating jobs in the area."



Hutcheson

Houston City Mayor Steve Hutcheson said the project is a positive for Houston.

"The announcement of the loan to the Texas County hospital is wonderful news for the City of Houston and the surrounding community. The county hospital is one of the key employers in the city and an expansion of this magnitude is a very positive sign for the area," he said.

"Houston is one of the few cities in southern Missouri that has held steady, and in some areas has grown, during the latest economic downturn. By making this loan, the USDA is showing continued confidence in our hospital and our com-

munity."

REPORTED FIRST
HoustonHerald.com

VIDEO: TCMH CEO Wes Murray discusses the announcement at houstonherald.com.

ARCHIVES: Read more about the project over the last three years on the Herald's website.

STORY: Board had its fingers crossed at last week's monthly meeting. | Online only.

SEVERAL HHS classes hold reunions over the weekend. | B6.

HOUSTON HIGH homecoming pictorial page. | B1.

THE HHS volleyball team moved a step closer to its first SCA title since 2006. | A6.

HOUSTON WOMAN wins at national shuffleboard tournament. | A8.

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