

Easton Memorial Hospital, Talbot to talk about land offer

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EASTON—Shore Health System President and CEO Joseph P. Ross wrote the Talbot County Council on Monday, proposing a series of private meetings to discuss in greater detail the county's offer of 90 acres for a new medical campus off U.S. Route 50.

On March 19, the council made the offer of 90 acres next to the Talbot County Community Center, also proposing to make water and sewer lines available to the property line at no cost to the hospital. Shore Health System (SHS) officials replied that they would seriously consider the offer, but that it would take time.

Ross wrote that SHS will consider other sites inside Talbot County as well. Spokesman Patti Willis said later that the hospital board of directors has indicated they want the new hospital built inside the county.

Talbot County Council President Thomas G. Duncan said he considers it positive that SHS is looking to remain in the county, but that he wants the hospital to be built specifically in or around Easton.

If SHS found another site in or near Easton that works out better than the one offered by the council, that would be fine with him, Duncan said.

During the private meetings, Ross wrote, SHS would "seek to secure additional information and to clarify aspects of your proposal, for the purpose of bringing it to the Shore Health System Planning Committee for review."

Ross also outlined the specific purposes of the first two meetings. The first, he proposed, would center on the process for moving forward, who would participate in future meetings and what, if any, of the discussions would be made public. As Easton also would likely play a key role for the site to work, Ross wrote, SHS would also like to discuss how the town would be involved in the process.

The second meeting would focus on "issues such as ownership, financing, zoning and infrastructure, including water, sewer, roads, utilities and pedestrian flow," Ross wrote. The meeting also would involve discussion about the site in relation to expansion plans for the Easton Airport and any problems that might arise because of proximity to the airport.

Subsequent meetings would provide the opportunity for SHS advisors and county professional and technical staffs to discuss the issues and explore possible solutions, Ross wrote. The two parties could begin the process of developing a term sheet leading towards an "option document."

The option would allow Shore Health System to study the land while protecting its interests, Willis said.

Ross made it clear that SHS will continue to explore other possibilities.

“The process of planning for Shore Health System’s future demands that we be thoughtful and thorough and that we examine multiple options before deciding on a specific site,” he wrote. “For that reason, we intend to evaluate other possible sites in Talbot County at the same time we are evaluating the county offer and we will exercise the right to option a site or sites in addition to the one the county has generously proposed.”

“We do this not out of lack of enthusiasm or gratitude for your proposal but from a recognition of the seriousness of the decision we will be making. The financial investment required to create a new regional medical campus will likely entail hundreds of millions of dollars and will be the largest commitment of private capital ever made on the Mid-Shore. We must be thorough.”

Other sites have not yet been identified, Willis said.

Willis said she was optimistic of a cordial working relationship going forward. To thoroughly evaluate the proposal, many issues would best be discussed in a more free-flowing session out of the public eye, she said, such as private business information.

Duncan said he believed a private meeting could be positive so long as it related only to issues which the Maryland Open Meetings Act allows to be addressed behind closed doors. It is important to establish a dialogue, he said, but it also is important for the public to know what’s going on.

The council plans to schedule a meeting with Shore Health System, Duncan said. While they were sending a reply letter to Ross, Duncan said he wanted to wait until after Ross received the letter to discuss it.