

Planners OK plans for new Grasonville ER

Water and sewer to be extended to 14.7-acre site near 50/301 split

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CENTREVILLE — The Queen Anne's County Planning Commission voted unanimously Thursday to approve the concept plan by University of Maryland Medical System to build a freestanding emergency department in Grasonville.

The planners also voted to recommend the county commissioners approve an amendment to the county comprehensive water and sewerage plan to allow sewer and water service to be extended to the 14.7-acre devel-

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opment site, bounded by U.S. Route 50/U.S. Route 301 and Nesbit Road, just north of state Route 18.

The project is a partnership between UMMS and the county. The stand alone emergency center would be staffed by Shore Health System, an affiliate of UMMS. A multi-phase project is planned, with a 16,500-square-foot emergency department planned in the first phase. The building would later be expanded by 6,775 square

The entrance road would be off Nesbit Road.

Two three-story medical office buildings, each 75,000 square feet, would be built in the second and third phases. One building would have imaging and outpatient services on the first floor and doctors' offices on the second and third floor. The other building would have an ambulatory surgery center on the first floor, and doctors' offices on the second and third floor.

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"We're in a 'soon as possible' mode on that," said Joe Ross, CEO of Shore Health Systems.

The concept plan was reviewed at the meeting by architect Tim Barnhill, a principal in Hord/Coplan/Macht, of Baltimore; Tom Davis, of DMD & Associates, Centreville, the engineer for the project; Holly Tompkins, a senior land use planner with the County Department of Land Use Growth Management and Environment; and Steve Cohoon, chief of land use and

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zoning for the LGE department. Cohoon said the planning staff worked with UMMS and looked at sites in Centreville and Queenstown to put the free-standing emergency facility before the Nesbit Road property was chosen.

"One of the biggest constraints in the county was the availability of sewer and water," said Cohoon.

Planning Commission Chairman Frank Frohn said the project would have to conform to the Grasonville Community Plan if the development site was within the boundaries of the planning area. He said extensive landscape buffering, access to Route 18 and other items would have to be addressed. Those "micro issues" would be handled during the review of the site plan, said Chris Drummond, attorney for the planning commission.

The project will also require 6.5 acres of growth allocation to change the critical area designation from Resource Conservation Area to Intensely Developed Area. A growth allocation petition is sent to the county commissioners, then to the planning commission and state critical area commission, then back to the county commissioners for approval.

In response to a question from planning commission member Arnold Hafner, Ross said UMMS officials discussed the project with representatives from the county

Department of Emergency Services, but not the county Fire and EMS Commission. Hafner said UMMS needs to talk to the local volunteer fire companies.

Planning commission member Luke Howard asked if there could be any problems from light pollution at the round-the-clock emergency facility affecting homes on Route 18. Cohoon said the lighting plan still has to be worked out.

Chester resident Mike Koval said the proposed site could pose problems for emergency vehicles at the merger of Route 301 and Route 50. Vehicles heading south on Route 301 merge onto the left lane of the three-lane highway, then have to quickly cross two travel lanes to get off at the exit for Nesbit Road.

"I think the ambulances and emergency vehicles may have a problem," said Koval.

Queenstown resident Richard Altman, executive director of Queen Anne's Conservation Association, asked UMMS to consider decreasing the size of the two medical office buildings to 70,000-square-feet each, reducing the number of parking spaces in the parking lot, and planting more trees.

The planning commission also voted 6-0 to give a favorable recommendation to proposed county ordinance 08-27, which has text amendments to the county zoning ordinance for the emergency department project. The amendments to the suburban estate zoning district would allow "for profit institutional" as a permitted use; set the maxi-

mum floor area ratio (ratio of site acreage to building square footage) at 30 percent for institutional uses; increase the maximum impervious surface coverage to 65 percent for institutional uses; increasing the maximum building height from 30 feet to 45 feet; and add "medical campus" as a permitted institutional use.

Ross said it should take 14 or 15 months to build the stand alone emergency facility once construction starts. UMMS and SHS also plan to build a new regional hospital, and their preferred site is just north of Easton near the Talbot County Community Center off Route 50. It would probably take three years to build the hospital, but construction wouldn't start until 2012 at the earliest, said Ross.

The Queen Anne's County Commissioners approved the county's purchase of the 14.7-acre Nesbit Road property for \$600,000 in January 2008. In May 2008, the commissioners approved a memorandum of understanding with UMMS that guarantees the stand alone emergency facility would operate in the county for at least three years. The public-private partnership calls for the county to contribute about \$4 million in infrastructure improvements, including sewer and water service.

Helen Spinelli, chief of community and environmental planning for the LGE department, said the emergency department property will be added to the Grasonville growth area.