

MCCLEARY

Mayor wants Mark Reed to stay in the community

HOSPITAL CONSIDERING
SEVERAL LOCATIONS,
INCLUDING ONE IN ELMA

BY JILLIAN BEAUDRY
The Daily World

MCCLEARY — McCleary Mayor Gary Dent isn't shy about his opposition to relocating Mark Reed Hospital to Elma. He believes it will hurt McCleary businesses and citizen morale.

"I've made it clear that the city is opposed to a move out of the area," Dent said. "That little hospital was built here. It will have a psychological and emotional hurt for us (if it leaves)."

Recent talk in Elma about building the \$15 million to \$25 million Mark Reed Hospital on the Oakhurst Convalescent site has hit McCleary hard, Dent said.

If the hospital does move to Elma from McCleary, he said his citizens may begin traveling east to get medical care and may want to leave the hospital district that runs Mark Reed. He said he has been looking into the legal possibilities of that option.

Renee Dunham, Mark Reed CEO, said the citizens of McCleary could leave the district by a vote of the people. She stressed that the hospital district is considering many sites, including some in McCleary, and nothing is yet set in stone.

The district is looking into two McCleary properties owned by Green Diamond, and four or five Prudential properties that together could lend 15 acres for the new hospital, Dunham said.

"No decisions have been made," Dunham said.

"We're trying to communicate the best we can (with McCleary). It's important that people help us by being informed. We're looking out for the better of the whole — we serve everybody."

Dent said he wasn't happy with the way the district did not go to the voters to decide the location of the new hospital as had been done with the two previous bonds for funding to build the hospital.

"It was a tricky little move," he said.

Dunham said the McCleary voters turned down two bonds to build a hospital previously. With improved finances and to not burden the taxpayers, the district is looking to take out a loan for the project.

"What we considered was that we had done two bonds in McCleary and they failed," Dunham said. "To us, that said the community wasn't willing to financially support the hospital."

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Hospital

Dunham said support in McCleary is growing for Mark Reed Hospital, but in her opinion, the community still doesn't seem to want to pay for the hospital because taxes are high enough already.

Dent is concerned about what happens if the hospital leaves town, specifically the impact on its small businesses to grow and future residential growth. He said as McCleary prepares to become more of a suburb to Olympia, a hospital in

town is needed.

"It was definitely part of our plan to minimize that impact," Dunham said. "We don't want to abandon all healthcare in McCleary."

She said there is a possibility that if the hospital relocates from the city, the current facility could serve as a primary care clinic.

Dunham said she and Dent are scheduled to meet to talk soon. On Thursday, the data from the study to determine the location will be presented at the district's board meeting. Town Hall meetings will be held in Elma and McCleary the following week.