

Hospital triples size of expansion project

EVERGREEN PARK | Little Company of Mary officials hope to break ground in 2009

BY STEPHANIE GEHRING
STAFF WRITER

Little Company of Mary Hospital is tripling the size of a project to add a women's health center to its Evergreen Park campus.

Hospital officials plan to construct a new building and renovate some existing spaces in its north and south pavilions for a total of 275,000 square feet.

The new building, which is tentatively being called the west pavilion, will house the new women's health center, as well as 90 medical/surgical beds with private rooms and private baths, outpatient behavioral health and the hospital's kitchen/dining service, according to preliminary plans, hospital spokeswoman Denise Stillman said Thursday.

The project is expected to add between eight and 22 beds, depending on the size of the rooms, Stillman said. A portion of the new beds will be dedicated for the women's center, and the balance will be for general medical use.

But the hospital's mission remains the same, officials said.

"Our vision is to be an extraordinary community hospital," Stillman said.

Officials expanded their plans after they announced in October their intention to build a new women's center at the hospital.

"We looked at the whole campus and how it would change with the new women's health center," Stillman said.

Hospital officials originally had thought they would add to the women's health center building at a later date to reach its goal of all private rooms with private baths. About 62 percent of the hospi-



Officials are planning a major expansion/renovation project at Little Company of Mary Hospital, 2800 W. 95th St., in Evergreen Park. The project consists of constructing a new building, which will add a women's health center. FILE PHOTO

tal's 318 beds are private.

"Waiting and trying to update the campus over a 10- to 15-year period was more risky than moving forward with a five-year plan," said Dennis Reilly, the hospital's president and chief executive officer.

Rising construction costs were a key factor in the decision to move forward with the larger project and the hospital's goal of having all private rooms, officials said.

The new version of the project was pitched to the board and approved in November, Stillman said.

"We haven't done anything this big," she said. "It's very exciting."

She said the project, which is estimated to cost up to \$180 million, will be funded through a capital campaign, borrowed funds and internal resources.

The project is about 86 percent new construction and 14 percent renovations,

Stillman said.

Mary Freyer, the hospital's chief operating officer, and Sister Kathleen McIntyre, chairman of the hospital board, said the project continues the legacy of the sisters and the hospital.

"It's not something we're going to be leaving for the next generation to do. It's our responsibility," Freyer said.

Letters were sent to some neighbors Thursday, and officials expected to make a hospital-wide announcement today.

"They need to modernize the buildings they have, which will put them in a better position competitively, so I think it's needed," Evergreen Park Mayor James Sexton said.

Sexton said he has not seen any plans for the project and is concerned about parking.

"We'll have to wait and see on that," he said.

Reilly is exploring options to replace and add any needed parking spaces from the project, Stillman said.

The new facility will be built alongside the hospital's tower building and then the tower building will be razed, Stillman said.

The tower building is the hospital's original building. It houses medical/surgical patient beds, cardiology testing, outpatient behavioral health, administrative offices, the family birthing center, pediatrics and dialysis. But it has become obsolete, officials said.

McIntyre, who was born at the hospital and also did her nurses' training there, said a new building will be more efficient.

"It was called the crucifix form," she said. "It was probably efficient in the 1930s and 1940s, but the delivering of quality healthcare became more difficult because of the way it was built."

Freyer, chief operating officer, said to try to renovate the existing tower building would not be feasible.

But the hospital will need the community's help to pay for the project. Officials said they will move forward with the capital campaign despite a downturn in the economy.

They hope to break ground in 2009, but the project must be approved by the Illinois Health Facilities board and the Evergreen Park Village Board, Stillman said. Hospital officials hope to submit their proposal to the facilities board in the fall, she said.

"When you think about it, it's a walk of faith. God wants us to make this investment in this community, to continue to serve the people," McIntyre said.

Stephanie Gehring may be reached at sgehring@southtownstar.com or (708) 633-5971.



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