

Hospital plan draws praise, complaints

By Tim Carpenter
News Graphic Staff

Grafton — The reception was largely favorable for a proposal to build a 480,000-square-foot regional medical center on the village's east side during a public hearing-informational meeting at Grafton High School auditorium Tuesday afternoon.

"I look forward to having another hospital to choose from," said town of Cedarburg resident Nancy Switzer about having

an alternative to Columbia St. Mary's in Mequon. "There's talk about a duplication of services. This county is growing. I don't see duplication of services as such a bad thing."

The Aurora Health Care center is proposed for a parcel at the corner of Highway 60 and Port Washington Road.

The meeting was held in part to gather information and receive public input on the request to rezone the parcel to a Planned Unit Development and annex over

35 acres of the project from the town of Grafton into the village.

Aurora and Advanced Healthcare announced their intentions in July to build a regional medical center featuring a hospital and 80,000-square-foot office building as part of an alliance formed by the two parties.

The hospital is expected to employ 600 and feature 89 beds, 24-hour emergency room and a Vince Lombardi Cancer Clinic, among other services. The structure also is

slated to feature multiple entrances, a 980-car parking lot and a helicopter pad.

Roughly 150 people attended the two-hour hearing.

Aurora Health Care officials and contractors working on the project updated the crowd on changes made to the design plan, such as the elimination of a commercial outlet along Port Washington Road.

Project coordinators balanced the re-

See AURORA on Page A7

Thursday, Nov. 29, 2007

News Graphic / Page A7

Aurora: Will have an impact

Continued from Page A1

removal of the outlot by redistributing some of the parking spaces and loosening up the green space on the site.

A majority of the wetlands on the property will remain intact, according to Aurora officials, who indicated they have met with members of the Ulao Creek Partnership and will continue to seek input from the group.

As for the impact the medical center is expected to have on the community's quality of life, Village Planning and Development Director Michael Rambousek said the project isn't expected to undercut Grafton's ability to adequately provide services such as sewer and water and law enforcement to residents.

While the bulk of comments from the public were in support of the project, the medical center did draw some scrutiny.

"This a very pro-Aurora packed audience," Sue Newman of Grafton said. "Traffic is becoming very serious (in Grafton). Highway 60 and Port Washington Road is obviously going to continue to be developed and is going to be a nightmare."

Therese Pandl, chief executive officer of Columbia St. Mary's, questioned the need for another hospital in Ozaukee County.

Attributing a number of professional studies on the subject, Pandl claimed the 89 beds proposed for the center would more

than double the number of hospital beds needed for every 1,000 people living in Ozaukee County.

"In my opinion, the addition of this hospital in Ozaukee County is irresponsible, especially at a time when there is a large concern about rising health care costs locally and nationally," Pandl said.

Robert Haveman, Professor Emeritus of Economics and Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, challenged Pandl's claim, citing other studies indicating the ratio of beds to people in Ozaukee County is below the perceived need.

Hired by Aurora Health Care to examine whether there's a need for another hospital in Ozaukee County, Haveman said his research shows 40 percent of Ozaukee County residents currently travel outside the county for hospital services.

He also pointed to statistics showing a 17 percent increase over the last five years in the 65 and over population in Ozaukee County, the age group most needing medical services.

The plan commission is expected to make a recommendation to the village board on the annexation and rezoning requests at its Dec. 13 meeting.

The board is slated to make a final decision on the matter at its Dec. 17 meeting.

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