

NEW LONDON

Hospital expansion proposed

\$21 million project to revamp the campus

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A planned \$21 million expansion of New London Hospital would modernize patient rooms, increase space for specialty services and bring doctors who practice on the campus closer to the heart of the hospital.

The hospital has been developing its proposal for about 18 months, meeting with employees, board members and town officials. But it went public with a detailed description of the plan this week after learning that the state certifying board would review part of the proposal at its next meeting in March.

"It's quite exciting," said Bruce King, the hospital's CEO. "This is the biggest thing that's happened to this hospital in 50 years."

King said that the expansion was proposed as part of a plan to meet the growing needs of the community. The proposed expansion was driven by problems with aging structures and by the limited capacity for popular programs.

Specialty programs like cardiology, oncology, the sleep lab and the clinic for patients on blood thinners have outgrown the hospital's current space. All four are located in what was once the hospital's small maternity ward.

"They all have blown by all of our forecasts for these services," King said.

To make way for expanded specialty services, the hospital plans to move its administrative office out of the main building and into a nearby structure that now houses physician practices.

Physician practices, in turn, would move into a 46,000-square-foot addition to the current hospital. The first floor of the building would host specialist offices and a large rehabilitation center. A second floor would include additional office suites for doctors who work on campus.

The project would also add eight new private patient rooms, enabling the hospital to renovate its existing rooms so that all 26 hospital beds are private and include private bathrooms.

The entrance to the hospital would move closer to the new addition, with the current entrance reserved for the emergency room only.

King said that the improvements are designed to make patient care and physician life more seamless. Currently, many doctors who see patients in the hospital also see patients in office buildings far from the hospital. The plan would move the hospital's core services into a single facility with room for growth.

If everything goes according to plan, King said, that construction

could start in July, with the project complete 18 months later. But the hospital needs a series of approvals before it can move forward with the expansion.

The improvements to core hospital services require the approval of the state certificate of need board, which reviews hospital expansions based on state and regional needs.

The hospital also needs the go ahead from its own board of directors and the board of Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, which helps run it.

Finally, the project requires approvals from New London's planning and zoning boards. Susan Bryant, the hospital's vice president of development and community affairs, said the expansion would comprise the single largest building project in the town's history. Hospital executives have shown conceptual plans to town boards but have not begun official reviews.

The financing for the plan is also being reviewed. King said that the hospital will finance the project through a combination of community funding, existing capital reserve funds and tax-exempt bonds. King said he has been speaking with investment bankers, who are interested in funding the project, but no details are final.