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Will Lutheran Move To Clear Creek Crossing? What Will Replace It?

■ By Mike McKibbin

Lutheran Medical Center may be relocating from its longtime location in Wheat Ridge to the Clear Creek Crossing project, a 110-acre, mixed-use development southwest of Interstate 70 and Colorado Highway 58.

The move needs approval – and possibly as much as a half-billion dollars – from Lutheran's owners, SCL Health, a nonprofit faith-based health system. Grant Wicklund, Lutheran's CEO, said that approval is planned to be sought next spring and the relocation would take several years.

Lutheran has been in Wheat Ridge since the early 1900s. It employs around 1,500 full-time workers and a medical staff of more than 1,000. A 2015 study found it had a \$33 million economic impact on the city and surrounding area.

"When you're talking about asking for hundreds of millions of dollars for a project like a hospital, the list of things you have to do is like a book," Wicklund said in an interview. "We've been showing those things to the SCL board and they've been supportive, but no final decision has



THIS SEASON'S OPERATION BLUE SANTA COLLECTED TOYS AND DONATIONS to be wrapped and distributed to more than 200 families in need by the Optimist Club and the Wheat Ridge Police Department. The gifts were delivered Saturday, Dec. 14. PHOTO COURTESY WHEAT RIDGE POLICE DEPARTMENT

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been made.”

The core of the existing Lutheran facility was built in 1959, he noted, and two engineering firms told hospital officials three years ago it would likely cost well over \$200 million to bring the building up to current code requirements. Crucial parts such as the heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems are no longer manufactured, so replacement parts are manufactured in the basement, Wicklund said.

“So we would have to either shut down entirely to do the work we need to do or we can build a new facility in a more accessible site for a better hospital for the future,” he added.

Project developers and SCL Health signed a contract for the sale of a 26-acre parcel in 2018, after word of a possible second hospital in the city, operated by UCHHealth, raised concerns.

Wicklund noted the Clear Creek Crossing site would feature new “hook” ramps from I-70 that would make a new facility more accessible for visitors and ambulances with emergency care patients.

Wicklund said a rough timeline now calls for final approval by the SCL board in May, then another 3 to 4 years to build and finish the new facility.

“It won’t be any bigger than what we have now; we aren’t adding any new beds because they aren’t needed,” he stated.

Construction could start in 2020 or 2021 and could end up costing between \$350 million to \$500 million as a “rough guess,” Wicklund said.

If relocation happens, the use of the current nearly 100-acre site will be determined, he added. Lutheran, West Pines Behavioral Health, Lutheran Hospice and other campus buildings currently occupy the site.

“We don’t want anything crazy,”

Wicklund said, “so something in health care like senior uses would be good. But we haven’t decided. We have had many phone calls from people interested in buying the land.”

When word spread of the plans for relocation after Wicklund spoke at the Wheat Ridge Rotary Club in November, some comments made on the Wheat Ridge Politics Facebook page focused on the future of the current site.

Nicole Dominic wanted to “hear what the plan is for the huge void this is about to create in the middle of our town.”

Lloyd Levy warned, “Get ready for the most intense battle over development this town has ever seen. How will all the high functioning seniors who sign and support petitions in our fair city react when the gates are opened, the land rush begins, and traffic projections for 32nd and 38th go ballistic.”

Clear Creek Crossing is owned by Evergreen Development Co. Managing Principal Tyler Carlson said Lutheran has been “a great partner to work with and have in our master plan.”

“They’re a longtime stakeholder in the Wheat Ridge community and will support our retail and hospitality aspects of the project,” he added.

The overall project is in the infrastructure phase of construction, Carlson said, with earth-moving the main activity for roads and utilities. The I-70 hook ramps are planned to open after the first of the year and roadway and utility work could be finished by April, he added. Work is then planned for the developable sites and already underway on 310 market-rent apartment units in a 4-story structure. Kum & Go plans to build a gas station and convenience store north of the existing La Quinta Hotel and Foothills Credit Union is planning a 3-story, 15,000 square foot bank and office building, Carlson said.

“The Crossings” will include retail shops and restaurants at the southeast corner of 40th Avenue and Clear Creek Drive.

“We’re talking to about six restaurants



A DRONE PHOTO TAKEN JULY 16, 2019, SHOWS EARTHWORK UNDERWAY at the Clear Creek Crossing project southwest of Interstate 70 and Colorado Highway 58 in Wheat Ridge. Lutheran Medical Center hopes to relocate from its longtime city location to a 26-acre project parcel purchased last year by the hospital’s owners, SCL Health. COURTESY EVERGREEN DEVELOPMENT CO.



AN ARCHITECT’S DRAWING SHOWS A CLUBHOUSE AT THE CLEAR CREEK CROSSING project southwest of Interstate 70 and Colorado Highway 58 in Wheat Ridge. Lutheran Medical Center hopes to relocate from its longtime city location to a 26-acre project parcel purchased last year by the hospital’s owners, SCL Health. COURTESY EVERGREEN DEVELOPMENT CO.

and smaller anchor tenants,” Carlson stated.

Overall, the project is a little behind schedule due to negotiations over some Denver Water facilities, he added.

“This has been the most complicated

infrastructure project in Wheat Ridge,” Carlson said. “As they say, it takes a village and everyone pulling their weight” to complete a project of the size of Clear Creek Crossing.