



Sequoia Healthcare District
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Coastside Residents Testify to Healthcare Needs; Sequoia Healthcare District Board Subcommittee Adds Study Options

HALF MOON BAY — The sudden closure in March of the Coastside Family Medical Clinic severely impacted availability of healthcare services on the San Mateo County coastside and the problem has become worse, area residents told Sequoia Healthcare District Coastside Healthcare Subcommittee members Don Horsley and Kim Griffin at a study session Monday. Testimony at the meeting in Half Moon Bay also brought to the surface several concepts — in addition to potential annexation of the coastside to the healthcare district — that will be on the table for further study.

Coastside residents asked if it were possible for the district to pay for transportation to and from medical clinic services it currently helps to fund at Samaritan House and the North Fair Oaks Clinic, whether the district legally could loan funds to a nonprofit or other entity to allow it to set up a new clinic in the Half Moon Bay area for repayment later, and whether a fund source other than a parcel or property tax, such as a tax on sales, could be used to support coastside healthcare. Sequoia Hospital Chief Executive Officer Glenna Vaskelis, who joined the panel to contribute hospital service providers' perspective, added that a special category of service called a hospital-based rural clinic might also have to be studied.

Subcommittee chair and Sequoia Healthcare District Board of Directors President Don Horsley reported that the district has allocated \$10,000 to fund a needs assessment in concert with the ad hoc Coastside Healthcare Committee and will meet in the community again within a month to report on some of the ideas floated Monday night.

The Coastside Healthcare Committee is associated with the Phoenix Project, a locally-based formative nonprofit that is following up the closure of the coastside clinic and working to pick up the burden of community healthcare.

Sequoia Healthcare District is a 63 year-old special services district that serves the healthcare needs of communities within its boundaries, which include the cities of Redwood City, Atherton, Belmont, Menlo Park, Redwood City, Portola Valley, San Carlos and Woodside, plus parts of San Mateo and Foster City from Skyline to the bay.

A second healthcare district, Peninsula Healthcare District, includes the bayside cities north of Sequoia to San Bruno. Daly City, Pacifica and the coastside to the Santa Cruz border are outside both district boundaries.



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Healthcare districts, which derive funding from the property tax, cannot spend funds outside their boundaries.

One option to extend services to the coastside would be annexation, which would generate some local funds but more importantly would allow coastside nonprofits to participate in Sequoia's grants program. This year Sequoia Healthcare District supports 25 community nonprofit healthcare organizations with a record \$1.5 million in funding.

Because it has contracted with Catholic Healthcare West, which operates Sequoia Hospital in Redwood City, to share in the profits of the hospital, and because it has more than \$22 million in reserves, Sequoia Healthcare District is able to pay back in community programs more than \$8 million annually, despite tax revenues of \$6.7 million.

The district is a major funder of the county's Children's Health Initiative, Samaritan House and North Fair Oaks clinics and operates the HeartSafe program, which places automated external defibrillators in public places throughout the district.

The statement that Sequoia cannot spend grant funds on the coastside prompted one of the 30 community residents present Monday night to suggest a loan program to seed a medical clinic startup in Half Moon Bay.

Another suggestion would fund coastside activities after annexation without tapping the property tax or require a parcel tax. The alternative would be a local tax on sales. Director Horsley agreed that the idea should be studied, but pointed out that sales tax revenues can fluctuate wildly, which is one of the reasons the State of California cannot balance its budget, while property tax revenues are a relatively stable source of funds.

Annexing the coastside into the Sequoia Healthcare District would require a needs assessment and hearings before the county's Local Agency Formation Commission. The decision to annex and the funding mechanism to support it would require an election on both issues. Annexation requires approval of 50 percent plus one of residents voting. The most likely funding mechanism would be a parcel tax. A parcel tax requires two-thirds voter approval.

Director Horsley speculated that the entire process could take two years.

If successful the annexation would add coastside representation to the five-member Sequoia Healthcare District board of directors.

Study session discussion concluded that:

- Transportation is a priority to get patients to existing healthcare at Seton Coastside Medical Center in Moss Beach, at the Rotacare Coastside Clinic in Half Moon Bay, which serves the most needy, at the Sonrisas children's dental clinic and at private providers locally and "over the hill" on the bayside.
- An urgent care facility is a priority.



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- Needs are urgent — even the defunct Coastside Family Medical Clinic turned away 20 patients a day while it operated and the demand for services has increased since its closing.

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