

St Maries Gazette Record, Wednesday, June 16, 2010 – by Dan Hammes

St. Maries hospital plans change

Board members voted unanimously last week to change plans for the new St. Maries hospital and clinic. Instead of two new buildings, one for the hospital and one for the clinic, trustees opted to build a single five-story building across from the post office to house both facilities.

The new proposal will cut construction costs by about \$575,000. “The savings on the one-building approach will be used to build a public entrance and walk path along the front entrance (north face) of the hospital campus,” Brian Nall, CEO, said. “The enclosed public walkway will free up traffic from the existing corridor which will help us make tremendous steps in increasing infection control and security.”

The original plan called for the new clinic to be constructed over the top of the present clinic. When the new clinic was completed, the old clinic was to be demolished, which would provide covered parking.

“While we will not have covered parking under the new plan, we did gain more parking spaces with the new proposal. That combined with the savings convinced the board to opt for the new proposal,” Mr. Nall said.

Mike LaPlante, a member of the hospital board and chairman of the building committee, was reluctant to support the change. He said he preferred to keep the clinic and the hospital in separate buildings. In addition, he was concerned that the voters were told there would be two buildings.

“In the end however, from a program standpoint, the new proposal makes sense,” Mr. LaPlante said.

In addition to lower construction cost, Mr. Nall said locating both the clinic and hospital in one building will be more efficient.

“The board did not take this decision lightly. It was only after considerable consideration that trustees opted for the new plan. They believe it is better use of money and will better serve the public,” Mr. Nall said.

In November voters approved the hospital's request to borrow up to \$28.5 million to build and equip a hospital addition and new clinic. Plans call for construction to begin late this year.