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Times-News

Twin Falls, Idaho

Tuesday Aug. 15, 2017

by Julie Wootton

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St. Al's eyes new hospital

The health care provider and the city of Twin Falls are in early discussions

TWIN FALLS — Saint Alphonsus Health System is in talks with city officials about building a new hospital in Twin Falls.

The health care provider contacted the city's building department two weeks ago and asked to meet about a conceptual plan. And last week, in an email to the city obtained by the *Times-News*, Saint Alphonsus mentioned plans to build a hospital and emergency department here.

The email was sent to discuss talking points should reporters inquire about the discussions.

"We would prefer you not talk about specifics of the project (size of project, definitely not location of the project, no specifics about it being an emergency department and hospital)," wrote Mike Chidester, Saint Alphonsus' real estate director, in an email to Jarrod Bordi, the head of the city's building department.

On Monday, Bordi confirmed the city's discussions with Saint Alphonsus but declined to discuss specifics, saying he could be revealing industry trade secrets if he provided details. Saint Alphonsus spokesman Joshua Schlaich also confirmed that discussions were underway but said it was too preliminary to formally announce any plans.

It's "very early on in the process," Schlaich said. Saint Alphonsus is considering a number of concepts for communities it could potentially serve, he said.

"Where there's a need for health care services, we want to make sure we're providing what's necessary to keep people healthy," Schlaich said.

Adding a new hospital would be a significant development for Twin Falls, where the economy is booming and the region continues to add residents and new businesses, schools and housing. It would also create competition for health care services and provide more choices for patients who could choose between St. Luke's, which now runs the city's only hospital, and Saint Alphonsus.

Twin Falls Mayor Shawn Barigar, who's also president and chief executive officer for the Twin Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, said Monday he hadn't heard about the conversations with Saint Alphonsus.

But as a growing community, he said, Twin Falls continues to get the attention of service providers, including retail, housing developments and health care providers.

A spokeswoman for St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center declined to comment, saying there was too little information about Saint Alphonsus' plans.

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Requesting a meeting with city officials to discuss options for a new facility isn't unusual for companies considering new projects. These types of early meetings are opportunities to learn about building codes and planning-and-zoning rules. Sometimes they lead to finished projects, sometimes they don't.

"A lot of other people do that," said Bordi, the city's building official. "We offer that service to everyone."

The city hasn't issued a building permit for the project, and there are no indications Saint Alphonsus has recently purchased property in Twin Falls.

Schlaich, the Saint Alphonsus spokesman, again emphasized the health care provider has not decided if it will pursue a facility here, and there is no timeline for when a decision will be made.

He said there's a lot of analysis that goes into looking at one community or another to provide services, but he couldn't point to one specific reason for looking at Twin Falls. He did, though, mention population growth and demographics, including the age of residents.

Saint Alphonsus operates hospitals in Boise; Nampa; Baker City, Ore.; and Ontario, Ore.; serving about 700,000 people. It also operates the region's only Level II Trauma Center.

St. Luke's has provided services to the Magic Valley since 2001, when it began managing practices at the Physician Center, formerly run by the Magic Valley Regional Medical Center. It built a new \$242 million hospital in Twin Falls in 2011 and has since added a new surgery center to keep up with rising demand. St. Luke's is also building a new medical offices complex on its main campus on Pole Line Road.

Other hospital systems elsewhere in the Magic Valley include North Canyon Medical Center in Gooding, Cassia Regional Hospital in Burley and Minidoka Memorial Hospital in Rupert.

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