

Frank R. Howard Foundation

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May 24, 2018

Mayor Madge Strong
City of Willits
111 E. Commercial St.
Willits, California 95490

Dear Mayor Strong,

After watching the City Council meeting last evening on Channel 3, it occurred to me why there has been so much confusion over the City not being included in the public meetings for Measure B.

After the hospital became vacant, our Board felt that in keeping with our health care mission, that a sorely needed mental health facility might be a good use for the old hospital. We spoke with the Mental Health Board and the County of Mendocino about the possibility of using that site and the County requested that we conduct a cost analysis to determine whether it would be financially feasible. It's important to remember that this study was initiated before Measure B and, so, before there were public funds available for brick and mortar.

Our Board committed \$50,000 to do the study and to get an estimate of what it would cost to remodel the building. We asked a group of mental health experts, along with Carmel Angelo, to draw up a plan which they felt would best utilize the building for their purposes. This process took over six months and when it was ready, we gave the plan to the design-build contractor that built our medical office building. This firm is from St. Helena, however they used as many local sub-contractors as they could when they constructed our project. They came in on time and on budget and we were happy with their work.

Ms. Angelo met with Henry Omoregie from the California Department of Health Care Services who felt the proposed facility at the old hospital site would be allowed. She also contacted Carl Magann, Fire Chief for the Little Lake Fire Protection District. Chief Magann contacted the State Fire Marshall, Chief Ken Vollenwieder, to come and look at the building. This inspection was scheduled for March 10, 2017 but was later cancelled because of a landslide on highway 101. This inspection has not yet been rescheduled.

Previously, I had approached Chris Neary, Chairman of the Board for the Willits Unified School District, asking if the school board would be supportive of a mental health facility at the old hospital site. The board subsequently wrote a letter of support. The feeling was that many of the same people who might be committed to the facility are here now and are released from the hospital Emergency Dept. after 72 hours with nowhere to go but City streets in some cases. They had never had a problem in the many years that the hospital operated at One Madrone.

Before spending the money for the cost estimate, I felt that it was important to see if there was general community support for the project, as Fort Bragg was going through a community uprising over a mental health facility that was going into the middle of their town. Fifty people circulated petitions between February 1, 2017 and May 1, 2017 and obtained 1,000 signatures of people who live in our area who support a mental health facility at the old hospital location. These supporters include residents of the 95490 area code along with people who live in Laytonville and Covelo.

After we gathered as much information as we could and determined that the hospital could be used and that it would be much less expensive to remodel rather than to start from scratch, I asked to be put on the Measure B Committee Agenda in March after giving a short presentation at the February meeting under Public Comment. We simply wanted the Committee to know what work had already been done prior to the passage of Measure B.

I believe that is the reason that there seems to be some confusion. The Howard Foundation was doing their due diligence as to what use the old hospital might have and it had nothing at all to do with the Measure B Committee except that I asked to share our findings with the committee. There certainly was never any intent to hide anything or not include the City in the discussion. There just wasn't anything to talk about until the Board of Supervisors makes a decision either for or against using the old hospital as a mental health facility. I do know that I spoke with most, if not all of the City Council members when I was circulating the petition, so they would know what we were doing. There were also articles in the paper.

As far as the mental health board meeting last week, I personally put up 6 notices around town and I know that there was an article in the newspaper about the meeting.

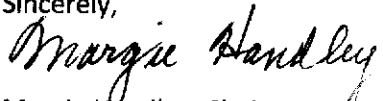
I served for 3 years on the Behavioral Health Board and when my term expired in December, I decided not to seek re-appointment. During the time I served, both Supervisor McCowen and Supervisor Hamburg were at the meetings, where the old hospital was discussed almost every meeting.

I'm sorry if this has caused any confusion, but the Foundation feels obligated to determine if the building can be used for a healthcare-related purpose before listing it for sale or demolishing it.

It has taken almost three years to come to these findings and we wanted to be ahead of the curve so that if the site is ultimately chosen, it would be ready to go and could be completed in less than two years, as the facility is needed sooner rather than later.

Thank you for your concern and I hope this helps to clear up any misunderstandings that may have occurred.

Sincerely,



Margie Handley, Chairman
Frank R. Howard Foundation

Cc: Ron Orenstein
Larry Stranske
Gerry Gonzalez
Saprina Rodriguez
Stephanie Sierra
James Lance
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