

## Richmond Confidential

### *New clinic to replace Richmond Health Center breaks ground*



By: [Christopher Connelly](#) | May 21, 2011 – 9:32 am |

A bevy of state, county and local officials donned hard hats and grabbed shiny new shovels to break ground for the West Contra Costa County Health Center in San Pablo on Friday. The shovels were ceremonial—Congressman George Miller bent his when he shoved it into the ground—but real work will begin soon on the new clinic that will serve real needs in the community.

“It’s been a long road to get here. We’ve been working on this for over 12 years now,” said John Gioia, county supervisor in charge of Richmond. He said that the two main obstacles were finding a good location, and getting the health center funded.

The state-of-the-art facility will replace the aging Richmond Health Center, which was built in the 1960s and deemed too expensive to repair. The clinic will be on a former mobile home park on San Pablo Road, just south of Church Avenue in San Pablo, and will serve patients on the county public health plan from Richmond, unincorporated North Richmond, San Pablo, and El Sobrante. It will continue to offer the same range of 53 different services to patients — including cardiology and pediatrics — that are currently available at the Richmond Health Center.



An artist's rendering of the new facility.

Like the Richmond Health Center, the new facility will provide outpatient care for roughly 80,000 patients each year. “It’s more than just a doctor’s office,” said county health services director Dr. William Walker. “It brings together primary and secondary care, outpatient surgery, nursing, home visiting, mental health services and substance abuse services.”

The new 53,000 square foot center is designed to accommodate a “medical home” model, where a person can go to one facility for all their medical needs. The model has been in use at the Richmond Health Center for some time now, said Walker. “But we’re working in a facility that doesn’t accommodate it,” he said. “We do the best we can, but it’s not built to work like that. With this new facility, we are able to build that space in.”

In the new health center, a patient will be treated in a suite of rooms where they will be seen by a physician, dietician, mental health specialist or any health providers who would help with things like chronic disease management, he said. They will also have access to county-administered preventive care programs as well.

In the 1970s, Contra Costa County became the first county in the US to develop a county-administered public health plan. About a tenth of the county’s residents get their services through the health plan, including low-income Medi-Cal recipients, the majority of county employees, and people who earn too much to qualify for state healthcare programs but can’t afford private insurance, said Supervisor Gioia.

Originally, Gioia said he wanted to find a location for the new center in Richmond, but he said the San Pablo location would serve the community better because of its position near major bus lines. “When we charted out where the patients who used the Richmond Health Center lived, this location really made a lot of sense,” he said.

Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner, was also at the groundbreaking, and said that the attention that went into finding a good location was more important than the funding. “We all know that proximity and access to healthcare services are as important as getting funding for them,” she said, “because we could have the best services but if they’re located 15 or 20 miles away, many of us who live in West Contra Costa could not be able to use them.”



The new health center will cost \$45 million.

Roughly \$12 million of the funding comes from federal stimulus funds, secured by Congressman George Miller who represents California's 7<sup>th</sup> district, which includes western and northern Contra Costa County and parts of Solano County. The rest is being financed through county bonds.

"Thank goodness we have a president, President Barack Obama, and a congressman in George Miller who understand that a downturn in the economy is exactly the time to invest in our communities and to put our building trades back to work," said Skinner in a speech to the roughly thirty people gathered to see the groundbreaking.

Gioia said there is an agreement with the contractor, Oakland-based Turner Construction, to do the hiring through local labor unions, and that he is encouraging the unions to hire from within West County.

West Contra Costa County has one of the highest unemployment rates in the state, according to Aram Hodess, who works with Plumbers Local 159 and sits on the county's Labor and Building Trades Council. "Some locals have as high as 45 to 50 percent unemployment," he said. In Richmond, the general unemployment rate has hovered around 18 percent over the last year, though many officials say that figure is low because it does not include people who have stopped looking for a job.

The West County facility is the last of the eight county health centers to be rebuilt, but it will be perhaps the most technologically advanced. Walker said it would be the first LEED-certified health clinic in the county, a national standard for green building and efficient design. The new facility will also employ a fully electronic medical records system, which Walker said increases patient's involvement in their care by giving them online access to their records.

The West Contra Costa Health Center is slated to open in July 2012, but Gioia insisted it will open ahead of schedule and under budget.