

## **Richmond council urges Kaiser to provide millions to beleaguered West Contra Costa hospital**

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Contra Costa Times*

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RICHMOND -- The City Council on Tuesday urged Kaiser Permanente to provide emergency funding to Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo, which may not have the cash on hand to stay open this year.

"West County will have a health crisis if we close," said West Contra Costa Healthcare District Chairman Eric Zell. "We are not crying wolf."

The five present council members voted to support a resolution that calls on Kaiser to provide bridge funding to DMC to maintain operations until a new institutional partner can be secured. Without funding, the hospital could cease operations by May.

"Doctors Medical Center is a vital part of our community's medical safety net," said Councilman Jim Rogers, one of the resolution's co-sponsors. "We are very concerned."

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The West Contra Costa Healthcare District Board of Directors, which owns and operates Doctors Medical Center, declared a fiscal emergency for the hospital in November.

At the time, interim hospital CEO Dawn Gideon said the hospital has been hemorrhaging \$1.5 million per month for the past two years and faces a growing deficit crisis that requires deep cuts, new funding streams and partnerships with other hospitals to avert closure.

The Richmond resolution has no power to force any action.

DMC spokeswoman Remy Goldsmith said hospital officials have been in ongoing talks with potential "strategic partners" to ensure DMC's long-term viability. One possibility is a partnership with UCSF Medical Center in San Francisco.

"But it will take at least 18 months for anything to be codified with any strategic partner," Goldsmith said. "To get to that point, we need funding."

DMC released a statement Tuesday saying it "welcomes the city of Richmond's support during this time and appreciates the efforts of Richmond's City Council to raise awareness about the severity of our situation."

The city's resolution notes that 38 percent of DMC's patients are Richmond residents.

"DMC is the only public, safety net hospital in western Contra Costa County," the agenda report reads. "Its closure would significantly impact the community and the wait times at Kaiser Richmond."

DMC faces a \$16 million budget shortfall this year, Goldsmith said. More than 40,000 patients visit DMC's emergency room annually, she said.

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Zell said the hospital board must decide within 30 days whether to forge ahead or begin preparations for closure.

In a funding proposal sent to Kaiser in November, Zell requested up to \$20 million from the Kaiser Foundation to continue operations while exploring a potential partnership with UCSF.

The hospital, which mostly cares for MediCal and Medicare patients, has been in financial turmoil for years. In the last decade, Kaiser has already given the hospital about \$13 million to sustain operations, and county voters approved new parcel taxes to support DMC in 2004 and 2012, Zell said.

Kaiser Permanente spokesman Jessie Mangaliman released a statement Tuesday saying the hospital is "currently evaluating that request."

Mangaliman added that Kaiser Permanente shares "a mutual concern about access to care for underserved residents of Richmond and West Contra Costa County" and has provided financial support to DMC in the past.

DMC has 25 emergency room beds, and Kaiser has 15, according to county Supervisor John Gioia, who also urged Richmond to pass the resolution. DMC's closure could mean significant increases in emergency room wait times, said Councilman Jael Myrick, and lives could potentially be imperiled.

"It could be the difference between life and death," Myrick said.

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