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Astoria pioneers unique care project

Clatsop Care Center plans residential facility for people with special needs

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SANDRA SWAIN — *The Daily Astorian*

Anita Schacher is chief executive officer of the Clatsop Care Center Health District. Her office is on the top floor of the Health District's Retirement Village, which she administers, along with the Clatsop Care Center nursing home on 16th Street in Astoria. A third facility, the Clatsop Care Center Innovative Care Campus, is planned for a site at Astoria's Mill Pond Village.

A multibuilding care facility is in the works for a prominent site in Astoria's Mill Pond Village. Clatsop Care Center Health District plans to construct the Clatsop Care Center Innovative and Memory Care Residence complex at 23rd Street and Marine Drive.

The facility will serve special needs groups. Clients will include people diagnosed with dementia or traumatic brain injuries, as well as bariatric patients in the 200- to 400- or 450-pound weight range.

Called innovative care, the project is the brainchild of the Health District's board of directors and Anita Schacher, the district's chief executive officer. Its goals harmonize with the goals of a state program called On the Move in Oregon, which aims to get patients out of long-term care in nursing homes and into community-based care whenever possible and appropriate.

"This is a pilot project for the state, the first of its kind," Schacher said. "Lots of people are watching this."

Designed by Portland-based LRS Architects, the facility will consist of three one-story duplexes and one two-story building that will be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The duplexes, called Memory Care housing, will be located between Marine Drive and Steam Whistle Way and arranged around an inner courtyard. Each will house eight dementia clients, four on each side of the duplex.

Schacher said each unit will have its own dining room, living room and kitchen. All the clients will have private rooms and gender will not be a factor in placing clients.

"They won't be playing bingo," Schacher said. "They'll be living life: baking cookies, peeling potatoes, folding laundry."

To the west, at 23rd and Marine Drive, will be the Innovative Care building, with eight units for bariatric care on the first floor, and eight units for brain trauma patients on the second floor.

Schacher said Clatsop Care Center Nursing Home on 16th Street currently has "young," that is, under age 65, stroke patients. "We would like a different environment for them," Schacher said, and the new facility would provide that. The Health District also operates Clatsop Retirement Village, an assisted living facility located on Youngs Bay.

Schacher said bariatric care is in short supply. Nursing homes don't want extremely obese



Artistic Rendering courtesy of LRS Architects

The two-story Innovative Care Building at the corner of 23rd Street and Marine Drive will house bariatric clients and clients with traumatic brain injuries. The building, along

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with three single-story Memory Care buildings to the east, for clients with dementia and Alzheimer's, will make up the Clatsop Care Center Innovative and Memory Care Residence complex to be constructed at 2350 Marine Drive in Astoria's Mill Pond Village. The building will be built and furnished to accommodate the patient's family members, who are also often overweight, she said.

patients, she said, mainly because of the risk of injuries to staff. But the new building will have the right equipment, including a sling that goes under the patient and is attached to a ceiling lift that moves along a track on the ceiling. The equipment helps move the patient from bed to chair to bathroom, she said.

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Architect Dan Edwards said LRS has a great deal of experience in designing health care facilities - more than 200 senior projects in 30 states.

In this case, he and his team have complied with design standards set by both the city and the Mill Pond Village homeowners association. The Craftsman-style buildings recently passed the city's design review committee and Edwards expects the project to break ground in late summer or early fall.

Brett Estes, Astoria's Community Development director, said the city has had a very good relationship with Clatsop Care and the architects and he expects the new facility to be good for the community. He said the design is well done and complementary to the Mill Pond area, and having the amenity adjacent to Columbia Memorial Hospital and doctors' offices make a lot of sense.

"I think their project's wonderful," said Julia Huddleston, a project manager with Oregon Department of Human Services, noting that it provides 40 new units of capacity on the coast. It's a "Money Follows the Person" project, Huddleston added, funded by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. According to the DHS website, it will "demonstrate that long-term institutionalized populations of people with complex medical and long-term care needs can be served in their communities with wrap-around packages of supports and services." Huddleston said the new strategy for long-term care is based on research in the field over the last 25 years.

The need is bound to increase.

According to researchers at Oregon State University, 13 percent of Oregon's population is over 65 and the percentage will rise to more than 25 percent by 2050. Dr. Roy Little, a longtime health district board member who is an emergency room physician, said people think it's freeloaders in Cadillacs using up Medicaid funds, but they're wrong. "Half of Medicaid goes to long-term care. The reality is, it's grandma and grandpa, middle class people who have run out of money," he said. "There's a movement to find the least restrictive and least costly setting for long-term care." Little called the new facility a great idea and said it will provide better care for people who don't need intensive services.

Board member Mitch Mitchum is also an enthusiastic supporter of the project. "I think it's a slam dunk," he said, noting the board spent three years looking for a site before settling on Mill Pond Village, despite its special design requirements.

Mitchum noted that the new facility at Mill Pond Village will provide two types of specialty care that's badly needed but not available locally: Alzheimer's and bariatric. "These two populations are very underserved," Mitchum said, "and there are a lot more of them than most people think because typically they don't go out very much."

To get specialized care for Alzheimer's, for example, Mitchum said it's necessary to go to Longview, Wash. "A person already mentally isolated is also physically isolated," he said. "Medicare wants to get people out of nursing homes if they don't really need to be there. This provides an appropriate level of care at maybe half the cost. It's a prototype nationally," he said.

The state is putting its money where its mouth is. Mitchum said the state is guaranteeing occupancy for the first five years, and will pay the health district up to 90 percent if it doesn't have patients. "That's important to banks. It reduces the risk factor on financing," he said.

Schacher said the state funded 50 percent of the feasibility study and is providing \$1.5 million to \$1.7 million in On the Move funding money for the project. Bank of the Pacific is providing a 4.4 percent loan for the remainder of the approximately \$8 million project, which is expected to break ground late this summer or in early fall.

Mitchum said Schacher is recognized throughout Oregon as one of the top people in the field. "We've got a great team and a great project," Mitchum said. "There's already interest from people around the country. It's a feather in the cap for Astoria."

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