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WMC's master development plan updated to include new facilities

By BRIAN BREHM The Winchester Star
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Winchester Medical Center is seeking the city's approval of an update to its master development plan to account for new planned construction at its campus on Amherst Street.

City Planning Director David Stewart said the hospital, as a requirement of occupying Winchester's only Medical Center (MC) zoning district and in accordance with its planned unit development (PUD) certification, has to update its master development plan before any construction takes place on its campus. On Tuesday, Stewart presented the revised plan to the Winchester Planning Commission for its review.

"The hospital has not included any additional land to be brought into the campus of the Winchester Medical Center," Stewart said, so no property rezonings would be necessary for the proposed additions and the hospital's campus would not increase in size.

According to information submitted to the Planning Commission during Tuesday's meeting in Rouss City Hall, the hospital's updated master development plan includes construction of two new parking structures — one along Linden Drive and the other near the intersection of Amherst Street and Campus Boulevard — an expansion of its surgical facility along Medical Center Drive and the creation of a new medical office building adjacent to the proposed garage on Linden Drive.

No construction is currently scheduled and nothing can move forward unless the city approves the hospital's updated master development plan.

While a traffic impact analysis would be helpful to the city when or if it considers new construction on the medical center's campus, Stewart said no analysis is required. Craig George of Valley Engineering, a Rockingham County firm that is working with Winchester Medical Center on the master development plan update, added that traffic would continue to access the hospital campus as it currently does after the new buildings are put in, so any impacts due to roads surrounding the campus would be minimal.

"Is there any opposition to doing it?" Commissioner Madelyn Jimenez-Torres asked George in regard to a potential traffic study, the last of which was conducted in 2008. "I'm just concerned about the community around that area."

George said traffic impact analyses are generally required when a road — in this case, Linden Drive in particular — is expected to accommodate 4,000 to 5,000 vehicle trips a day "and we're not even in the realm of that."

"From my perspective and from my engineering background, I think there would be almost no impact to Linden based on what we're proposing on this master plan," George said, adding that a full traffic analysis could take six to eight months to complete.

Rather than waiting that long for the study results, Commissioner Leesa Mayfield suggested recommending City Council's approval of the revised master development plan with the condition that Winchester Medical Center works with the city to produce periodic traffic counts to ensure that any new construction has minimal impacts on the roads around the campus.

The Planning Commission eventually voted 5-0 to table the master development plan update for one month in order to give the hospital time to confer with city staff about any possible traffic issues that could result from new construction. Commissioners Brandon Pifer

and Mark Dyck were absent.

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