

# Hospital project challenged

## Unions want a closer look at the need for expansion

By Sharon Salyer  
Herald Writer

EVERETT - A coalition of labor and consumer groups is challenging the state's approval of Providence Everett Medical Center's \$500 million expansion, a move hospital officials say could cause delays and increase the costs of construction.

The coalition says the state Department of Health didn't adequately consider the financial impact the project would have on consumers, calling the Providence expansion one of the state's most expensive hospital projects.

The state Department of Health review, called a certificate of need, is the final step in allowing health care expansion plans to go forward.

The Everett hospital's plans call for building a 1,000-car parking garage and a 680,000-square-foot building and major expansion of the hospital's emergency room.

The new building would be adjacent to the hospital's Colby campus on land bordered by 13th Street, Oakes Avenue and 14th Street in north Everett.

The first step in this project is construction of the parking garage, which is expected to open early next year.

A delay in the building plans could add hundreds of thousands of dollars a month in construction costs and "millions of dollars over the life of this project," said Dave Brooks, the hospital's chief operating officer.

The challenge to the hospital's plans was filed by The Campaign to Make Health Care Work, a coalition of that includes the Service Employees International Union local 1199 Northwest, the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, Washington Community Action Network and the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 21.

The groups are asking the state to reconsider its approval of the project, both through administrative review by the state Department of Health and through a lawsuit filed against the state agency in Thurston County Superior Court on Wednesday.

The actions aren't aimed at stopping the hospital expansion project, said Robert Harkins, local SEIU spokesman.

"What we're concerned about is whether the state conducted adequate oversight," he said.

Will Pittz, executive director of Washington Community Action Network, said the key questions the groups want answered is whether the hospital's expansion is needed and what its effect will be on health care costs.

The state's review is supposed to determine if there is a need in the community for a proposed health care project and to review its costs, Pittz said.

"For a variety of reasons, we're not sure that was adequately done," Pittz said.

Research shows that construction and hospital expansion programs are "one of the primary drivers of rising health care costs," Pittz said.

"We think what we're doing is what the community wants us to do; what the community deserves," Brooks said.

"We don't believe that our expansion adds inappropriately ... to our health care costs."

The hospital has had a need for extra space for several years, Brooks said. Last week, "we literally had every bed filled" on the Colby campus, which has 243 hospital beds, he said.

At times, ambulances were told that "they'd probably be better off taking (patients) to a different facility because of how busy we were," he said.

The state Department of Health has received two requests to reconsider its review of the Providence expansion project, said spokesman Donn Moyer.

In addition to the request from the consumer and labor groups, Providence Everett Medical Center has asked for a review of the state's decision on the project, he said.

The state approved a plan to add 106 hospital beds as part of the building plan. The hospital requested a total of 166 additional beds and asked for reconsideration of their original plan.

The state has 28 days to make a decision on both reconsideration requests, Moyer said.

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