

El Cerrito clinic offers urgent care services in wake of hospital closure

A former emergency room physician at Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo has a new business idea that aims to fill some of the void in urgent medical care left by the hospital's 2015 closing.



Sumi Vasquez, left, medical assistant at New MD Urgent Care Clinic attaches a blood pressure collar to patient Kris Davis, of Richmond, in El Cerrito, Calif., on Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017. The clinic that provides basic medical services recently opened. (Anda Chu/Bay Area News Group)

By [Rick Radin](#) | Bay Area News Group

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EL CERRITO — A former emergency room physician at Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo has a new business idea that aims to fill some of the void in urgent medical care left by the hospital's 2015 closing.

New MD & Urgent Care's El Cerrito location opened at the Moeser Lane Shopping Center in December.

Under founder Dr. Ian Ahwah, who was with Doctors for about 20 years, New MD provides treatment for the most common complaints for which patients seek treatment at emergency rooms, including sprains, strains, flu, asthma and bronchitis, as well as providing vaccinations, sports physicals and occupational medicine.

It has its own laboratory and pharmacy, and is equipped to do X-rays, but not CAT scans, Magnetic Resonance Imaging or ultrasound, Ahwah said.

When the situation arises, the clinic also can stabilize patients with more serious conditions, such as heart attack and stroke, and then calls 911 to take them to full-service emergency rooms such as Kaiser Hospital in Richmond, Alta Bates in Berkeley or Contra Costa Regional Medical Center in Martinez, Ahwah said.

The clinic aims to fill a niche for patients with medical insurance between county-operated clinics that take Medi-Cal patients and offer free services, and full-service emergency rooms that charge facilities fees on top of professional fees for seeing a physician, Ahwah said.

“A lot of patients today have medical insurance with high deductibles so they have to be careful about showing up at a hospital emergency room that might charge \$2,000 to \$3,000 just to get in the door,” Ahwah said. “We only bill insurance for the professional services component.”



New MD Urgent Care Clinic is photographed in El Cerrito, Calif., on Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017. The clinic that provides basic medical services recently opened. (Anda Chu/Bay Area News Group)

The clinic is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays but plans to offer after-hours and weekend coverage to supplement the services of private primary-care physicians.

Ahwah also heads an urgent care facility in American Canyon in Napa County that has been operating for about three years, and is in the planning stages to open a third clinic in Pinole.

The locations of the three clinics will roughly bracket the Doctors Medical Center service area that ran from Crockett on the north to El Cerrito on the south.

The American Canyon and El Cerrito clinics have nine doctors on staff, including six who worked with Ahwah at Doctors Medical Center.

The business model is working well so far at the American Canyon clinic, Ahwah said.

“We saw 50 patients there yesterday,” he said. “It took about nine months to get it fully up and running.”

The clinics do have one major advantage over the system at Doctors — computerized medical records, which flag drug interactions and keep easily accessible records of past treatments.

“Everything we did at Doctors involved sorting through paper records,” Ahwah said. “Here, we have everything computerized and interactive.”

Details

New MD & Urgent Care clinic is in the Moeser Lane Center at 10612 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito. 510-529-4629.

Hospital detachment effort gets final LAFCO approval

- By Frank Robertson Staff Writer
- February 8, 2017

A small but dedicated audience of Russian River residents applauded a county governance panel's final decision last week to detach the river area from the Palm Drive Health Care District's parcel tax rolls.

"You should feel very proud of yourselves," said Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) Vice Chairman Teresa Barrett prior to LAFCO's unanimous vote last week.

The vote culminates a two-year-plus effort by TAUT, Taxpayers Against Unfair Taxes, to detach the Forestville, Guerneville and Monte Rio school districts from the Palm Drive Health Care District that levies an annual parcel tax of \$155 on property owners in the health care district comprising most of western Sonoma County.

River area detachment sponsors said river property owners have already paid more than \$23 million in parcel taxes since the hospital tax was created in 2004 but have benefitted from only a fraction of that — less than one percent — in terms of cumulative hospital benefits.

"We have paid more than our fair share," said another TAUT supporter, Monte Rio property owner Michele McDonell, at last week's public hearing.

Detachment means the river area will continue to pay parcel taxes needed to pay off the health care district's existing mountain of debt that includes about \$24 million in long term bond obligations, plus approximately \$9 million owed to employees and vendors in bankruptcy claims.

But the detached river area property owners would not be burdened for hospital operation costs or future bonded debt, although it was not clear after last week's vote whether the health care district may be responsible for debts incurred by the Sonoma West Medical Center (SWMC), the nonprofit entity now operating Sebastopol's former Palm Drive Hospital.

With Sebastopol's hospital facing an uncertain fiscal future, including the prospect of more borrowing, "We want to be out" before new debts pile up, said Forestville resident Gary Harris, who with his wife, Carolyn Harris, and the late Margaret Benelli of Guerneville, succeeded in guiding the detachment petition drive to its culmination last week.

If SWMC goes under, "I'm afraid the district will be on the hook for more money," said Harris.

Last week's vote also included an agreement over how much the detachment petition effort will be billed to cover the cost of the detachment process.

The bill for services, including LAFCO staff time, attorney fees and other expenses, will probably exceed \$10,000, said LAFCO Executive Officer Mark Bramfitt in a report to the commission last week.

But the seven commissioners on LAFCO, which regulates the boundaries of cities and special districts in Sonoma County, agreed to limit the expenses due from the petitioners to about \$5,000.

The fee represents the cost for LAFCO's outside expenses such as legal fees, county recorder's office charges and state board of equalization bills.

TAUT, which has already put up a \$2,500 deposit with LAFCO for detachment process costs, will pay the remaining bill from TAUT support funds but may need to hold a fundraiser later this year at the Rio Nido Roadhouse to cover out-of-pocket expenses, said Gary Harris.

More than 2,000 river area residents signed the petition in favor of detachment, a number representing more than 25 percent of voters within the detachment districts.

The effect of detachment on the hospital's long-term survival is not clear. Health care district directors last year said detaching the river area would force the hospital to close.

A LAFCO study last year said detachment of the Guerneville, Monte Rio and Forestville area would reduce the health care district's parcel tax revenues by as much as 40 percent and could require the district to increase property taxes elsewhere or sell more bonds to keep the hospital going.

"The district would not become insolvent in the event of detachment — it simply wouldn't have the resources to devote to hospital subsidies as planned," says the LAFCO Municipal Service Review conducted last year.

The hospital's precarious financial condition makes it "challenging" to figure out what the district's future holds, says the MSR.

Annual parcel tax revenues total approximately \$3.7 million in the 200-square-mile health care district that includes nine school districts encompassing the communities of Sebastopol, Graton, Forestville, Bodega Bay, Carmet, Salmon Creek, Jenner, Duncans Mills, Guerneville, Occidental, Freestone, Rio Nido, Monte Rio, Summerhome Park and Mirabel Heights.

Health care district directors opposed the detachment but failed to generate much support for their position. Detachment opponents had until last Wednesday to submit protests but just one protest had been sent to LAFCO by last week's deadline, said LAFCO's Bramfitt.

None of the health care district's elected directors showed up for last week's public hearing.

East Bay Times

Guest Commentary: East County leaders must act to reallocate funds



East Contra Costa Fire Station 54.

By [Judith Prieve](#) | jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com |

PUBLISHED: February 10, 2017 at 11:12 am | UPDATED: February 10, 2017 at 12:10 pm

The East County Voters for Equal Protection, a nonpartisan citizens action committee, is organizing a workshop later this month to discuss a proposal to correct the structural funding deficiency that is afflicting the local fire services agency, the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District.

Twenty-two local government entities have been invited, including the county, the cities of Brentwood and Oakley, special districts and schools.

The proposal ECV is advocating will improve ECCFPD funding by about \$7.8 million, and potentially provide for three additional fire stations, bringing the district's total to six. There are now just three permanent stations serving 110,000 people spread over 249 square miles. The proposal relies on the traditional growth in property tax revenues to avoid any cuts in current funding. If the proposal is adopted the increased property tax revenues that 22 government entities can expect would grow a little slower over a three or four year program implementation period.

This proposal is a significant one. It is the type of policy decision that elected officials, the chosen representatives of the public, need to make because it is the general public who will benefit from this program.

Government administrators are naturally opposed to this proposal. City managers, schools administrators, the county administrator, have all gone on record opposing the solution because their specific government entity would lose future funds.

These government workers are not looking at the big picture. All government funds come, in one manner or another, from the public taxpayers. The money ought to be used to meet the needs of today's taxpayer population.

That's why the elected representatives of the people need to make this decision, not those who are paid to operate pieces of the people's business.

The Ghost Ship Fire occurred in Oakland several months ago. It was a tragedy that took the lives of 36 people at a warehouse in the city's District 5. Noel Gallo is the city council member who represents District 5, and he stepped forward visibly during the crisis. He is a former school board member who understands the importance of fire and emergency medical response services to a community. Gallo will speak at the fire district funding workshop.

The structural funding problem that has increased response times and reduced the number of firefighters is not a new phenomenon. It has grown as East County's population has grown, dramatically since the late 1990s. Attempts to solve the problem with new tax measures have failed three times.

This proposal, if adopted, will address this structural funding problem. It will provide money to East County fire and emergency medical services so that ECCFPD receives an allocation rate closer to the rate that other parts of the county receive for their fire and emergency medical services. The funding allocation rate will then be at about the average for the county's fire districts.

Shifting public money to a higher-priority service, in many cases a life-sustaining service, is the right thing to do. Three lives have been lost due to inadequate response capability, a fire department official has said.

The proposal being brought forth is not new. It has been talked about for over 15 months. ECV was formed in January of 2016. The leaders of this group have made 19 formal presentations to public agencies, civic and social groups. They have attended over 46 meetings with elected, hired, or appointed officials, and conducted 10 public committee meetings. Over 75 articles and opinion pieces have been published in local periodicals, online, and in social media by ECV.

It is time for our elected representatives the people to do what's best for the people.

Bryan Scott is a Brentwood resident and Co-Chair of East County Voters for Equal Protection, a non-partisan citizens action committee whose aim is to improve funding for the ECCFPD. He can be reached at scott.bryan@comcast.net, or 925-418-4428. The group's Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/EastCountyVoters/>.

East Bay Times

Commentary: Twin tunnels prevent general water solutions



Rain runoff flows along Prospect Street in Berkeley, Calif., on Thursday Feb. 9, 2017. (Anda Chu/Bay Area News Group)

By [Karen Mitchoff and Diane Burgis](#) |

PUBLISHED: **February 10, 2017** at 12:00 pm | UPDATED: February 10, 2017 at 12:25 pm

This winter and spring may forever be known – like many fishermen would say – as “the one that got away.”

Over the past two months, California has experienced a series of severe storms, which caused numerous cities and counties to declare states of emergency. Rather than having the necessary storage capacity in place to collect and store storm water runoff for future use, massive amounts of rainwater from our bountifully wet winter flowed down swollen creeks and rivers, through the Delta and out the San Francisco Bay to the ocean. It’s water that we desperately need during drought conditions like those we’ve experienced for much of the last decade.

And this spring, we will watch it happen again as the Sierra snowpack melts.

Why the failure? State leaders have almost singularly focused on building giant tunnels in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to ship water southward while ignoring the bigger picture to address California’s ongoing and future water needs.

The state’s plan, known as the California WaterFix, has dominated the state’s water policy agenda at the expense of the Delta and other less fiscally and environmentally controversial water projects. As a result, the Delta will continue to deteriorate and there may never be a genuine water solution for California.

If the state continues to focus its political will on the WaterFix and its twin tunnels, it will continue to miss opportunities to be more effective and efficient managers of water. There are better, more cost-effective solutions that don't pit Northern and Southern California against one another in the quest for reliable and high-quality water supplies.

Local communities are already investing in storm water capture devices, low-impact development building standards, conservation measures and groundwater recharge but we need to quickly implement these types of solutions on a larger scale in order for them to make a significant difference. Planning for drought may be difficult in wetter periods, but we must act.

Capturing a portion of the more than 1 million gallons per second of water currently flowing out into the San Francisco Bay is also possible; however, additional above- and below-ground storage is needed for this to occur. With warmer winters and snow melt often occurring earlier in the season, water supply from our snow pack is less reliable, which emphasizes the need to start making storage a priority.

The mission of the twin tunnels to move more water south is hopeless. The science is clear: Exporting too much water from the Delta in dry years, which is the unspoken goal of the California WaterFix, will cause irreversible impacts to the ecosystem, push protected fish species to the brink of extinction and damage our region economically and environmentally.

Instead of the WaterFix, what if the state had focused its efforts on completing storage projects, levee improvements and better use of taxpayer-funded bond money to more swiftly construct essential statewide water projects?

We should have been better prepared for the storms. Now we need state leadership and the Legislature to rededicate themselves to sustainable options that the state and local communities can afford and implement in a reasonable time frame. It's imperative we take advantage of abundant rainfall and snowpack.

If state leaders continue to have tunnel vision, we'll continue to lose opportunities to move forward in a manner that benefits every Californian. It's past time to get serious about taking the necessary steps for what will hopefully be the next bountiful rain year. We can't "let 'em all get away."

Karen Mitchoff is a member of the Delta Counties Coalition, vice chair of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors and serves on the Delta Protection Commission and Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy Board. Diane Burgis is a member of the Delta Counties Coalition, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors and the Delta Protection Commission. She also lives on the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Learning from Oroville: Water Board Proposes Climate Change Resolution

A new resolution from the State Water Resources Control Board would make sure that climate science is integral to all its work, providing a much-needed example for other agencies to follow, writes scientist Juliet Christian-Smith.

Written by [Juliet Christian-Smith](#) Published on σ Feb. 20, 2017 Read time Approx. 3 minutes



This aerial view looks east toward Oroville Dam and Lake Oroville, showing the damaged spillway with its outflow of 100,000 cubic feet per second (around 2,800 cubic meters per second) at the Butte County site. *Dale Kolke / California Department of Water Resources*

Earlier this week, while areas downstream of Oroville Dam were still under an evacuation order, California's State Water Resources Control Board released a [draft resolution for a comprehensive response to climate change](#).

It resolves that the agency will embed climate science into all its existing work, both to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and to build resilience to the impacts of climate change. In doing so, the state water board demonstrates how public agencies can respond more proactively to the challenges that global warming is bringing our way.

A Failure to Plan Is a Plan to Fail

After five years of record drought conditions, California has received more rain in just a couple of months than its reservoirs can store. This may seem strange but it is exactly what [climate](#)

[scientists have predicted](#) for the state since the 1980s: prolonged warm and dry conditions punctuated by intense wet spells, with more rain and less snow, causing both drought and floods.

Despite having a wealth of science at our fingertips describing how our water system is changing due to global warming, too often we have not put this information to use. During the federal relicensing of the Oroville Dam, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) [chose not to assess](#) how climate change might affect the dam's operation.

In response to this “foundational error,” Butte County and Plumas County sued the DWR. Their suit argues that the environmental analysis associated with the dam relicensing should be rejected as unscientific. It stated, “Rather than rigorously assessing climate change, DWR’s Oroville FEIR [Final Environmental Impact Report] presumes that hydrologic variability from the previous century ‘is expected to continue in the foreseeable future’ and that it would be ‘speculative’ to further analyze other climate change scenarios ... Due to this error, the FEIR is predicated upon a hypothetical future that DWR knows to be dangerously false.”

While we know that the past is no longer a predictor of the future, we continue to plan for the past. It’s easier, it seems less expensive, but it has huge, hidden costs – costs now being borne by the nearly 200,000 residents who were evacuated, by the affected counties, and, eventually, by taxpayers who will pay to repair the damage.

This is why it is highly important to plan for the future, and particularly more “extreme” climate conditions. We are on the precipice of giving away almost \$3 billion of public money for new water infrastructure without requiring these new water projects to use climate science and existing modeling results to assess how the proposed projects would fare under more “extreme” climate conditions. The [Union of Concerned Scientists](#) has repeatedly encouraged the California Water Commission to require that new water projects provide a quantitative assessment of the impact of climate “extremes” on project operations. However, in December 2016 the California Water Commission [approved regulations without this requirement](#).

State Water Board Commits to Using Climate Science

Mistakes are an inevitable part of life, but we need to learn from our mistakes. The state water board has taken an important step forward by drafting its resolution, which requires that the state and regional water boards rely on sound modeling and analyses that incorporate relevant climate change data and model outputs to account for and address impacts of climate change in permits, plans, policies and decisions.

There are many lessons from the Oroville Dam crisis, including the critical importance of using science to prepare for a future that will be different from the past due to global warming. We applaud the state water board for its leadership and hope other agencies will soon follow and commit to making better decisions using climate science.

The views expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Water Deeply.



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MOFD director threatens to resign over financials

By Nick Marnell

In its analysis of the district financial statements, the Moraga-Orinda Fire District financial reporting ad hoc committee, comprising directors John Jex and Craig Jorgens, found that the district reported \$20 million more in assets than it actually had, a mistake that the committee insisted the district correct before publication.

"The liability associated with a false and misleading financial statement is tremendous," said Jex, a retired Deloitte audit partner. "I would not be able to serve on the board if you put out a financial statement that you know is incorrect."

In 2005, the district purchased a \$28 million pension obligation bond to pay down its unfunded pension liability with its retirement plan manager, the Contra Costa County Employees' Retirement Association. MOFD carried this prepayment - \$20 million by 2016 - on its books, in addition to the net pension liability that CCCERA provided the district, which already included the prepayment. In effect, the district reported the same asset twice.

Pension reporting rules changed with the issuance of Statement No. 68 from the Governmental Accounting Standards Board in 2012, which directed government entities to stop reporting a prepaid unfunded pension liability as an asset by the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015. According to the MOFD ad hoc committee, the district continues to report its prepaid pension liability incorrectly, and the \$20 million prepayment should be written off. Jorgens said that based on GASB 68 Contra Costa County, a CCCERA member, wrote off \$300 million.

MOFD administrative services director Gloriann Sasser said that in 2015 she followed the guidance of the California Committee on Municipal Accounting in implementing the rules of GASB 68. The district auditor made no adjustments to her work and MOFD received an award from the Government Finance Officers Association for excellence in its financial reporting. "The GFOA director said that if we had implemented GASB 68 wrong, they would tell me," Sasser said.

Jorgens spoke with a senior staff member of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board who he said will offer guidance on correct implementation of the pension accounting standards on a conference call. Until that occurs, the ad hoc committee advised that the district not publish, post online or otherwise indicate that its financial statement for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2106 is accurate. "We will be materially misstating a fact by \$20 million that we have to supply to the public and our creditors," Jorgens said. The district plans to schedule the GASB 68 conference call at a special board meeting March 1.

MOFD remains sensitive about employee pension accounting. In 2008, the district incorrectly calculated the pension of its retiring fire chief, and the CCCERA board ruled that the chief had to return more than \$1 million in improperly earned retirement benefits.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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News Deeply/Water Deeply

How the San Francisco Bay Area Is Balancing New Development and Water

Population growth in the Bay Area is spurring the need for new housing developments, but in water-stressed California this means that regional planners have to be more strategic.

Written by [Robin Meadows](#) Published on **Feb. 24, 2017** Read time Approx. 5 minutes



A luxury apartment building is under construction in Mountain View, California. The San Francisco Bay Area's population is expected to grow by 2 million people in the next 25 years, forcing regional planners to try to balance development needs with water resources. *Tara Lohan*

The San Francisco Bay Area is likely to be a lot more crowded in the near future, adding a projected 2 million people to the 7.5 million who already live here over the next quarter century. Planners traditionally focus on meeting housing and transportation needs as a region grows. But more people also means more demand for water – and choices we make today will determine how far our water goes in the future. Now regional planners have begun to address the disconnect between land use and water supply.

Whether or not we have enough water for growth depends on factors including climate change and the way we grow. “Climate change is a little out of our control, so we should focus on what we can control: the urban form and water efficiency,” said [Laura Tam](#), sustainable development policy director of [SPUR](#), a nonprofit dedicated to urban planning. “If we can sustain the current rate of water conservation, we could add only a fraction of water use even if we add millions of people to the Bay Area,” she explained.

[In 2010, California's per capita water use in cities was 178 gallons \(674 liters\) a day. And by 2015, several years into our recent severe drought, that was down to 130 gallons \(492 liters\) a day.](#) “One of the most encouraging outcomes of the drought is that we found out how much urban water use is discretionary,” Tam said.



Construction takes place at the site of Station Park Green, a mixed-use development with 599 residential units, 10,000 square ft (930 square meters) of office space and 60,000 square ft (5,575 square meters) of retail space, in San Mateo, Calif. Infill development is seen by regional planners as more water-wise than suburban growth. (Tara Lohan)

Strategies for shrinking the water footprint of new housing include compact development, or urban infill comprising multifamily housing with shared green spaces. “The average urban housing unit is more water-efficient than a suburban house,” Tam said. Compact development has less landscaping, which typically accounts for one-third of residential water use statewide. In addition, [perhaps one-tenth of California’s water supply is lost to leaks](#), and compact development means shorter pipelines, which inherently reduce the chance of leaks.

Compact development can also help low-income people save money, in part by letting them live closer to work. When low-income people live far from their jobs, transportation costs can be as high as housing costs, according to a [2006 report from the nonprofit Center for Housing Policy](#). In contrast, living near a city center decreases transportation costs by an average of 40 percent.

Another way to keep growth’s water demand in check is water-neutral development. This approach offsets the increased water needs of new housing via a combination of conservation and retrofits to existing developments. “Many old buildings have old fixtures, and the amount of water you can save with new ones is very significant,” Tam said. Installing water-efficient fixtures could save 22.5 gallons (85 liters) per person per day, according to [a 2014 report by the Pacific Institute and the Natural Resources Defense Council](#).

The [East Bay Municipal Utility District](#) requires water offsets when new housing is annexed to its existing service area. So far, the district has struck deals on six water-neutral developments, according to [a 2015 report by the Alliance for Water Efficiency](#). Similarly, some Bay Area cities are requiring water offsets before moving forward on proposed developments, said Nicole Sandkulla, CEO of the [Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency](#) (BAWSCA), which represents 26 water suppliers in Alameda, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

The City of Brisbane, for example, is requiring water neutrality for the proposed [Baylands development](#), 4,400 residential units on a former landfill and rail yard near the shores of the Bay. “The city says there’s not enough water and asked the developer to come up with it,” Sandkulla said. Likewise, Redwood City is requiring water neutrality for the proposed [Saltworks development](#). This controversial project initially entailed up to 12,000 residential units on a former commercial salt production site on the edge of the Bay.

Moreover, the City of East Palo Alto is so tight on water that a building moratorium is in effect through the summer of 2018. And, said Sandkulla, other BAWSCA cities are short on the water needed to supply new development mandates proposed by the [Association of Bay Area Governments](#) (ABAG) under the forthcoming Plan Bay Area 2040. “ABAG is looking to push more people into the West Bay urban corridor, but some cities don’t have enough water,” she said. “ABAG needs to check in with water suppliers earlier – the focus has been on housing and transportation, but the other finite resource we have to address is water.”

In [a letter to regional authorities last October](#), Sandkulla wrote, “We strongly urge you to work with local water suppliers to consider the long-term water supply reliability implications of your regional land use planning effort.”

ABAG’s current regional housing plan states that “local jurisdictions consider infrastructure requirements, including water and sewer capacity, when developing their general plans and neighborhood plans,” but then adds that “this information is not used to limit a jurisdiction’s housing allocation.” In addition, there is little mention of the water supply in the current Plan Bay Area, which was adopted in 2013, said ABAG resilience planner Michael Germeraad.

But he does see signs of better coordination between land use planning and the water supply. “In the past, there was less pressure on discussions of growth and water,” Germeraad said, adding, “Now, we’re moving towards considering water earlier in the process.”

ABAG’s 2015 annual meeting focused on actions cities and counties can take for drought resilience, and in 2016 the agency began facilitating meetings between elected officials and water utilities to discuss growth. “Understanding the water supply could inform the development process – for example, we could build differently to reduce water consumption of new units,” said Germeraad, citing built-in dual-pipe systems for drinking water and gray water as an example.

The need to plan our future water use is further intensified by climate change. In the years to come, the Sierra Nevada snowpack that provides much of the Bay Area’s water will likely be smaller, and the snow that does accumulate will likely melt before the end of the dry season, when we need it most. And, Germeraad pointed out, if our water supply drops as our population grows, “the water that we do have will be shared by more people.”

[This story](#) first appeared in the [Bay Area Monitor](#).

East Bay Times

A new plan to save Bay Area hospitals from closure

Since 1998, approximately 50 California hospitals have closed



New legislation by Senator Nancy Skinner would require the California Attorney General to sign off on any nonprofit hospital closure before it is allowed to proceed. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group)

By [Karina Ioffee](#) | kioffee@bayareanewsgroup.com |

PUBLISHED: February 27, 2017 at 1:23 pm | UPDATED: February 27, 2017 at 3:47 pm

OAKLAND — Bay Area politicians unveiled a new plan aimed at stopping a wave of hospital closures in California, including Berkeley's Alta Bates Hospital, slated for closure as early as 2020, by giving the state Attorney General the authority to review the impact of the decision before allowing it to move forward.

The legislation, authored by state Sen. Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley), focuses on not-for-profit hospitals, such as Kaiser, Alta Bates and Summit. Under current law, California hospitals are only required to give a 90-day notice to the Department of Public Health prior to shutting down operations. If passed, the hospital would also be required to hold at least one public hearing.

The announcement comes two years after the [closure of Doctors Medical Center](#) in San Pablo, which recorded approximately 33,000 visits a year and served Richmond, Hercules, Pinole, San Pablo and surrounding communities. Since the closure, hospital admissions to the Kaiser Richmond Medical Center, the closest hospital, have tripled, according to Kaiser.

“Closing hospitals and emergency rooms worsen health outcomes and increase deaths,” Skinner said Monday at a press conference in Oakland. “There are longer waiting times for services, longer ambulance travel times and overcrowding at facilities.”

California has 6.7 emergency departments per 1 million people, the lowest ratio in the nation, [according to the American College of Emergency Care](#), and lacks adequate numbers of staffed inpatient and psychiatric care beds. Since 1998, 50 California hospitals have closed in the state, according to an [investigation by the Los Angeles Times](#), partly because the need for around the clock staffing makes them expensive to operate.

Hospitals say that with improvements in technology, more patients are now treated on an outpatient basis, requiring fewer beds. Critics counter that closures are largely profit-driven and argue that they put the most vulnerable at risk.

Related Articles

- [Planned closure of Alta Bates raises concerns of a health care desert](#)

In response to the closure of Doctors Medical Center, which closed after years of financial losses, and the looming closure of the 300-bed Alta Bates, new urgent care facilities have opened or are being built in Richmond, Emeryville, San Pablo and Berkeley. But urgent care facilities do not replace emergency rooms because they can’t treat heart attacks and other cardiac problems, sepsis or significant fractures, said Dr. Desmond Carson, a former head of emergency care at Doctors Medical Center who now works at LifeLong Medical Center in San Pablo, a nonprofit health clinic.

“A clinic cannot take on a gunshot wound, a fractured femur or do surgeries,” Carson said at the news conference. “If you have a heart attack and you don’t get to a place where we can open a vessel, you will lose time. And time is life.”

Hospital closures are politically unpopular, but politicians have had little recourse to challenge them. The hope is with the new legislation, which would require approval from the state, regulators will have more leverage to counter actions taken by hospitals, the politicians said.

“This is a smart and reasonable approach,” said Assemblyman Tony Thurmond, whose district includes Oakland, Berkeley, El Cerrito, Richmond and surrounding cities. “(Plans to close a hospital) should be reviewed and vetted by the Attorney General and should have a community meeting, which Sutter has not had the audacity to have.”

It was not immediately known what kind of support the bill, SB 687, has from other legislators.