

January 20, 2015

This is Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

We had a Chamber Mixer at the Low's building last week. The spotlight was on Economic Development.

It was the perfect setting to announce the big news that on that very day—Wednesday, January 14—the McLean Foundation and Redwood Memorial Hospital Foundation had signed an agreement allowing the McLean Foundation to buy a parcel of land near the hospital from Redwood Memorial/St. Joe's.

Sounds simple, right? I can tell you right now, that not only is the outcome monumental, but getting there is a lesson in collaboration.

Let's talk about the process first. Dennis Scott and the McLean Foundation—and for transparency's sake, I'm a board member—worked behind the scenes for a year with the City, Open Door and Redwood Memorial Hospital and St. Joseph Health System to make this happen.

The City needed to be on board to, among other things, get a lot line split approved. The Planning Commission recently had a special meeting to make that happen.

Open Door needed to have enough confidence in our process that they would put the time, energy and money into this project.

Redwood Memorial Hospital Foundation and St. Joe's needed to have faith that the McLean Foundation would do the right thing.

And the McLean Foundation had to not give up and keep trying to make things work. And of course, they had to buy property.

There was a lot more to it than that explanation. This all came about one year, one month and a few days after the community meeting in Fortuna to discuss the OB challenge at Redwood. The community rallying and showing their support for Redwood was astounding that day and gave the process legitimacy. So anyone who attended that meeting at River Lodge is also responsible for this project being able to move forward.

So what does it mean? It means that a Fortuna Community Health Center can be built in Fortuna as a Federally Qualified Health Center. And that means not only will funding be more available to build the clinic, we will have a business model that doctors want to be a part of. The old days of young doctors coming out of medical school and buying a private practice are gone. They want to come in to a model that has everything already set up, and that makes sense financially.

It means that Redwood Memorial Hospital has a fighting chance to stay alive in an era when many rural hospitals are folding. The wellness center will help Redwood, not be in competition with it.

It means that a state-of-the-art facility with more personal doctors will be available for the Eel River Valley. Unless you've been to the Eureka Open Door Clinic or the new Ferndale site, you might think Open Door Clinic sounds like a magnet for people looking for trouble. It's not. It will be a community health center that we will all be proud of. And it will serve all of us.

Look for more information over the coming months about this project. The more you know, the more excited you will be about it.

This has been Erin Dunn with a community comment.