

## County updated on osteopathic college

By Amy Smith Union staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, May 13, 2015 9:25 am

JEFFERSON — Plans for building an osteopathic medical college in Jefferson are moving forward, county officials were told Tuesday.

Consultants Jennifer DeKrey and Mark Lefebvre were joined by state Rep. Cody Horlacher as they updated the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors on the status of the College of Osteopathic Medicine slated for Jefferson's north side.

Preparation of the site by the Boldt Company has begun as DeKrey and Lefebvre continue to engage both the state and potential partners in an effort to raise the \$125 million needed to construct the state's third medical campus.

“We've been traveling the state; we've been having conversations with all sorts of potential partners as we draw together the consortium to create this college,” Lefebvre said. “The last time we were with you we talked about the shortage in primary care physicians, and that was the lead story ... but as we traveled the state and talked to people, we found out that the story was far more complex.”

Lefebvre noted that the need for a third medical college now is not only about a shortage of primary care physicians, but of the entire integrated care teams that take care of the state's residents and how medicine is practiced and delivered in Wisconsin.

As Lefebvre and DeKrey became more aware of how the College of Osteopathic Medicine could change the state's healthcare system, they also realized the significant economic impact the college could have on the entire state as a result.

Lefebvre noted that this year, 2,300 students were accepted into the nation's medical colleges. Of those students, only about 10 percent enrolled in schools in Wisconsin. And of the students who graduated from Wisconsin's two medical colleges, about 75 percent left the state to take residencies elsewhere.

“It's about primary care physicians ... but it's also about educating these kids in a new way, creating jobs, and keeping these kids here in Wisconsin,” the consultant stated.

DeKrey said that in long term, the college and its proposed model of endowing residencies will benefit every county in the state, and for the past six months, she and Lefebvre have been working with the state to convince officials that the college will in fact do just that.

A partner in that effort has been state Rep. Cody Horlacher, R-Mukwonago. His 33rd Assembly District includes Jefferson County in the cities of Fort Atkinson and Jefferson; towns of Hebron, Jefferson, Oakland, Palmyra, Sullivan and a portion of the Town of Koshkonong, and the Villages of Palmyra and Sullivan.

Horlacher submitted a budget motion to the state Legislature last week in support of the college. In addition, the group was to be meeting the state Joint Finance Committee today “to try to get this off the ground as far as the state is concerned,” the state Assemblyman told the county board.

The budget request asks that any funding to the college goes in as a bonding project under buildings, which would take part in the second year of the biennial budget.

“Bonding is one of those dirty words in some cases, but when it goes to building projects, especially for educational purposes, it is not looked at with such distain as other types of projects that you have bonded,” Horlacher said.

The freshman state representative also acknowledged the “gloomy situation with the budget, with cuts to the UW System,” noting that what Lefebvre and DeKrey are attempting to do is something that will move the state forward.

“While it is a substantial amount of money, if we invest that money into a project like this now, it is going to pay us dividends in the future, and that is what we have to convey to my colleagues in both houses,” Horlacher added. “Without a doubt, I understand the realities of this budget and where we are at, but I am very optimistic that we can truly educate people on the investment that this project could be, and what a huge win it would be, not just for this area, but the whole state going forward.”

Horlacher noted that the Confluence Project — a proposed arts center in Eau Claire — was removed from the budget by the Joint Finance Committee about a week ago.

“There are building projects throughout the budget,” he continued. “The Confluence Project was cut out of the budget just last week, and that was one of those projects. This, unlike the Confluence Project, has a statewide impact and it would be not only a huge economic win, but a healthcare win for the state. Unlike that project, a real tangible benefit can be seen as a result of this.”

The proposed College of Osteopathic Medicine would be a private, independent college and not be under the purview of the Board of Regents.

In December, the Jefferson Common Council gave the college 100 acres of land for the medical school’s campus, located east of the railroad tracks and west of Dewey Avenue. The land originally was intended as a possible expansion area for the city’s North Industrial Park, but the topography would have created significant challenges for growth.

The gift of land, which the city’s tax assessor estimates to be worth between \$15,000 to \$20,000 per acre, is subject to terms and conditions outlined in a land contract and escrow agreement signed by the college’s representatives.

The land contract and escrow agreement includes several measures that provide a safety net for the city should the college not succeed.

Under previous leadership, an osteopathic college originally was to be located at the facility on Sanctuary Ridge, the former St. Coletta of Wisconsin campus. However, multiple personnel changes and financial difficulties led to creation of a new corporation and vision for the college by DeKrey and Lefebvre.

Part of their vision included a bigger campus for the college on a different site.

The original organization’s proposal to redevelop Sanctuary Ridge was found unfeasible after several months of

analysis by a number of sources. The final tipping point was the opinion of a local historic preservationist who said it would cost significantly more to update the former St. Coletta building than to start from scratch.

And not only would the site come with a large pricetag, it would end up not being large enough for the proposed facility, planners were told.

Since that discovery, DeKrey and Lefebvre have been working with Jay Wall of the Boldt Company in Milwaukee, which is donating its time to the project.

Wall has created a conceptual site plan for the 100-acre lot, which includes several phases of construction beginning with a 110,000-square-foot, all-purpose academic hall, 240 studio apartments for student housing and a primary care clinic that would be open to the public.

The design plan also includes future development of a facilities garage, additional academic buildings and student housing, a wellness center and a student center.

DeKrey and Lefebvre first approached the common council in July with their plans to find that optimal location. They said the gifting of the land has allowed them to move on to the next step in the planning process, which is to continue to seek out potential philanthropists and secure a commitment from the State of Wisconsin in the form of advancing enabling legislation.

Under the first developers' proposed project, the City of Jefferson had acted as the sole financier by providing an incentive payment of \$250,000 to help fund development, with the promise of an additional \$250,000 in the future. That money, the only source of funding the college received, was spent on salary for the college's former dean, Dr. Gregg Silberg; legal and consulting fees; and operating expenses, without producing a feasibility study or any significant development progress.

Although the initial investment did not pan out the way the council had hoped, council members have indicated they believe the creation of a medical college within the city is a key to its economic success. Such an institution has the potential to create a \$121 million increase in economic activity during the construction phase and boost the wealth of Jefferson County by \$46.5 million, according to a previous study completed by Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium director Genevieve Borich.

Borich has said that the initial construction will create 979 jobs, and in the long run, the college has the potential to create 316 permanent jobs and increase annual economic activity by \$49.4 million.

Jefferson County could see an increase of wealth of \$25.2 million annually, with \$13.7 million in additional employee income throughout the county, according to Borich.

Completion of the college is planned for May 2018, with the first class of about 160 students matriculating no later than August 2018.

According to a 2011 report by the Wisconsin Hospital Association, the state needs to be producing an additional 100 physicians per year in order to bridge the gap between the doctors the state currently has and what it will need in the coming years.

The creation of an osteopathic college in Jefferson would be the first new medical college in the state in 100 years

Osteopathic medicine is a “whole-person” approach to medicine. Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine, known as D.Os, are fully licensed to perform all forms of healthcare.