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[BY JAMES DREW](#)

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The state is moving forward with plans to build a new 350-bed Western State Hospital at the corner of Sentinel Drive and Steilacoom Boulevard Southwest on the existing campus in Lakewood.

But Lakewood Mayor Don Anderson and other city officials have several questions about the multimillion-dollar project.

The state Department of Social and Health Services has submitted an update of the Western State master plan to the city of Lakewood. The city is seeking public comment through July 10 on the potential impacts of the state's plans for the site, which covers about 280 acres.

Also, the Lakewood City Council plans to receive an update on the master plan at a 7 p.m. Monday work session.

The new master plan is part of Gov. Jay Inslee's two-year-old policy to move nearly all mental health patients who are admitted to the big state hospitals through civil commitments into smaller facilities around the state. That way, they can be near family and community support.

The question is whether that actually will happen, Anderson said.

“Too many of those folks have been released into the community without adequate care,” he said.

Individuals determined by the courts to be a danger to themselves or others may be civilly committed to Western State for care and treatment. Those individuals have not been accused of a crime.

The state’s plan calls for opening the new Western State in 2027. The Legislature in 2019 approved \$1 million for pre-design, which is almost complete. The budget provision said the money would be for a new hospital on the Western State campus so DSHS did not look for other sites.

DSHS probably will seek \$550 million next year from the Legislature for design and construction, said Robert Hubenthal, the agency’s assistant director of capital facilities. Construction could begin as early as 2023 if funding is provided in the capital budget next year.

The state has said by 2026, nearly all of the patients at Western State will be forensic ones, who have been accused of a crime. During prosecution, the courts may commit individuals to Western State for an evaluation to determine if they are competent to stand trial. If found competent, the individuals are returned to jail to stand trial. If found not competent, they stay in the hospital until competency is restored.

The master plan update also reflects that “many of the existing facilities are aging and no longer comply with federal standards for the care of mental health patients.”

The federal government in 2018 pulled annual funding of \$53 million from Western State after the facility failed an inspection. Infractions included the restraint of a patient for hours without cause and an insufficient number of sprinklers in parts of the hospital.

Last year, a draft document prepared by an architectural firm hired by the state marked the former Fort Steilacoom Golf Course, which is adjacent to Western State, as the site of a new 500-bed forensic hospital.

Lakewood rezoned the former golf course parcels to limit development for recreational use. In addition to building a new 350-bed Western State, the state also is reserving space on the campus to possibly build a 48-bed community residential treatment facility.

The state is proceeding with design and construction of residential treatment facilities in Thurston County on the campus of the Maple Lane Corrections Center and a site in Clark County.

The state’s application to revise the Western State master plan calls for building a second 18-bed residential cottage at the Child Study Treatment Center as well as a treatment and recreation center, and demolishing several buildings.

Lakewood is seeking more details from DSHS on how many beds there will be — short-term and long-term — in the various buildings on the Western State campus, said Dave Bugher, Assistant City Manager and Community & Economic Development Director.

“We want to be very clear about the number of beds and when they’re going to come in and the timing,” he said.

Lakewood, which is the lead agency for the review under the state’s Environmental Protection Act, cannot block construction of the new Western State or other projects planned for the campus, Bugher said.

That’s because Western State and the Child Study and Treatment Center are “essential public facilities” under state law.

“Under the Growth Management Act, we can’t say no. However, we can definitely address mitigation measures – clarification on parking, addressing tree removal, compliance with the state’s new energy codes for construction of these types of institutional buildings, and potential road improvements,” Bugher said.

Bugher questioned whether the state would move forward with the new Western State and the other projects because of the projected decline in state revenue triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent projection said the state could see a \$8.8 billion drop in general fund revenue through mid-2023, including \$4.5 billion through the end of June 2021 in the \$53 billion operating budget.

“Are they going to have the financial wherewithal to move forward with this master plan or are they going to come back and do what they have done in the past, which is ‘we really can’t do this right now, so we’ll practice getting by with existing facilities that we know don’t work as well as they should’?” Bugher said.

Funding for a new Western State comes from the state’s capital budget, which is funded primarily by bond sales. The state’s debt limit is based on prior years’ revenue, which could insulate projects for a couple of years from being shelved.

“I would not expect in the [2021-2023 capital budget] that we would see impacts directly attributed to the current economic situation due to [COVID-19],” said Hubenthal, the assistant director of capital facilities for DSHS.

The city administration will make a recommendation on the proposed revisions to the master plan to hearing examiner Phil Olbrechts, who works under a contract with Lakewood. He will make the final decision on the master plan.

The public can provide written comments about the proposal to the City of Lakewood, Attention: Community and Economic Development Department, 6000 Main Street SW, Lakewood, WA. 98499.

Electronic comments can be made via a project website at wshmasterplan.org or by email to Planning Manager Courtney Brunell at cbrunell@cityoflakewood.us.

Comments must be received no later than 5 p.m. July 10. Those who want to become a party of record should include the request with their comments. Becoming a party of records enables people to appeal the hearing examiner's decision to Pierce County Superior Court.