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New building needed for Health Dept. officials say

By James Martinez, Staff Writer · Posted: Saturday, June 30, 2007 10:15 AM EDT

OTSEGO COUNTY — With growing programs, the Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency wants to add a new building near their current facility on Livingston Boulevard which would accommodate expanded dental services with training through two Michigan universities.

Gerald Chase, health officer of the health agency, approached the Board of County Commissioners who unanimously approved the concept at Tuesday night's meeting.

"At this time we have a couple of programs that have really grown and we need additional space," Chase said.

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The new building, to be located on the northeast corner of the 3.36 acres leased from the county, would house the dental and family health programs, which would share a common waiting room and classroom.

"This is a major expansion of our dental program. It would be making this more of a regional center," said Chase, who explained the additional space would allow the program to expand from five to nine dental chairs.

Chase did not elaborate on the size or cost of the new building at the meeting and was not available for comment on Thursday or Friday. County administrator John Burt said the county has not been approached with the building dimensions or cost.

Minutes from the March 6 Board of Health meeting mention development of replacement facilities for dental offices in Gaylord and Manistee with the same basic plan for a total of 3,078-square-feet. As Chase explained at the meeting, the expansion would allow the health agency to pursue contracts with the dental schools of the University of Detroit Mercy and University of Michigan to provide training to new dentists. A lab to produce dentures on site would be another feature to serve all the clinics within the health agency.

"All in all, my impression of the project is very good because I know the dental health clinics have expanded nicely and they're doing a good job bringing services to the low income and uninsured people," said county commissioner Doug Johnson in a phone interview after the meeting. Johnson also serves on the Board of Health, which governs the health agency.

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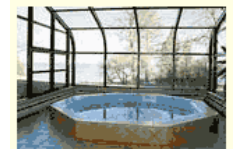
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Based on Chase's presentation to commissioners, the former space occupied by the dental program would be replaced by an expanded regional water testing program, while the family health facility would be remodeled to provide additional facilities which could be rented out or used by the health agency as well.

Chase acknowledged the plans for the building would still need to go before the Otsego County Planning Commission. Chase said he addressed the county commissioners first because as the health department pays off the mortgage of the original building, ownership of the building reverts to the county because it was financed on behalf of the county. The new building would be financed in a similar fashion, with ownership eventually reverting to the county.

The Northwest Michigan Community Health Agency serves Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego counties.

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