

## Columbia Hospital Project On Hold

On November 2, local voters reversed a 2004 measure to build a local community hospital in St. Helens, Oregon and supported Measure 5-209 that would de-fund the Columbia Health District (CHD) and stop work on the hospital.

The CHD Chair Jay Tappan said that he was surprised at the margin, 72 percent in favor of stopping the hospital, but he knows that angry voters were being heard all over the nation.

“Anti-government, anti-health care, anti-tax were all themes in this November election. We were caught in the eye of a perfect storm,” said Tappan.

The other hurdle was that the State Certificate of Need office issued a “proposed denial” of the project during the election season. “Although in early September, before the proposed denial from the State, our local polling showed 55 percent in favor of moving ahead with the hospital, we know that it

trended down after that announcement hit the local newspapers,” said Tappan. “I feel we just couldn’t overcome the perception that the project would never be given the go-ahead by the State.”

Although an unofficial opinion from the Oregon Department of Justice to the Department of Revenue indicates that the Measure 5-209 cannot be enforced, the Columbia Health District will have to get information on how to move forward with researching the measure.

The next regular meeting of the CHD board is on November 18, beginning at 5:30 PM Tappan said that gives him time to research options for the Board, while the District waits for the certified election results. The location of the meeting has not been decided.

Tappan said that in the meantime, he would “stand down” the hospital team which is the consultant working on the State’s Certificate of Need and the

hospital project management, pending a decision by the Board.

The Measure would stop the Columbia Health District’s permanent tax rate and also refund all the funds spent on hospital preparation and planning since the original measure passed in 2004 with 58 percent of the vote.

Preliminarily, the DOJ opinion on the measure says that although a district can levy a tax up to the limit, once the limit is approved by voters, it cannot be repealed. In addition, taxes legally levied and spent cannot be returned to taxpayers.

“This measure is very poorly written and confusing,” said Tappan. “If the District is totally defunded, it cannot pay for elections, board insurance and other legal requirements of Special Districts.” It will impact Public Health services, in that costs of the District to do business could fall onto Public Health

programs.

CHD has been working since 2001 to build a small community hospital in St. Helens that would provide 24/7 emergency services and attract primary care providers. In November 2004 district voters approved a 38 cents/\$1,000 tax to support construction. The District purchased property, designed the building and applied for the CN in July 2008.

Following a “proposed denial” of the CN in October 2009, the District updated financials and added a small primary clinic and resubmitted for review. The State again issued a proposed denial, and the District asked for an informal hearing to rebut inaccuracies in the State’s document. The rebuttal is currently being reviewed by the CN office.

## Banquet Honors Senator Merkley and Affordable Housing

The Oregon Opportunity Network (Oregon ON) celebrated its annual Awards Banquet on October 11 by honoring keynote speaker U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) with a Homegrown Industry Champion Award.

In its biggest event ever, Oregon ON was joined by over 450 of Oregon’s affordable housing and community development industry practitioners: nonprofit professionals, policy makers, industry executives and experts, banking leaders, government officials and staff, and more.

Senator Merkley has been a friend to the industry for almost two decades. He helped to create the Community Development Network in 1994, which, along with AOCDO, were predecessor organizations to Oregon Opportunity Network.

Before entering politics, Senator Merkley also served as the Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East and as the first Housing Director of Human Solutions. At those organizations, he led a neighborhood in shutting down Portland’s worst crack market, launched the pilot project which established the Portland YouthBuilders program in which gang-affected youth build homes in their own neighborhoods, and launched Oregon’s first Individual Development Account (IDA) program, helping low-income families save money to buy homes, send their children to college, and start businesses.

In his speech on October 11, Senator Merkley talked about his efforts to help families struggling with foreclosure, and the importance of the affordable housing industry: “The demand for the decent affordable rentals you create will be so much greater because of the mortgage crisis.”

He also spoke about current legislation affecting the industry and about his proposals to make

the Senate more functional, in order to benefit those who rely on affordable housing.

“Senator Merkley is one of our own, someone who really understands the challenges and importance of the affordable housing and community development industry, and who has shown his commitment to the seniors, working families, and people with disabilities that our industry serves,” said Margaret Davidson, Board Chair of the Oregon Opportunity Network and Executive Director of Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc.

Oregon ON also gave awards to nonprofit organizations across Oregon, including:

**Transparency Award** – Tom Cusack, Oregon Housing Blog

**Housing Access Award** – Fair Housing Council of Oregon

**Golden Hammer Awards** - honoring a housing project completed within the past two years that best demonstrates the ideals of affordability, quality of design, asset management, livability, community revitalization or service integration. Winners:

FHDC for Nuevo Amanecer in Woodburn, OR– a rehabilitation project that beautifully preserved and improved the first farmworker housing Low Income Housing Tax Credit project in the country; it houses 90 farmworker families. Preservation of existing affordable housing for vulnerable populations is an industry priority.

Polk CDC for Jen’s Place in Dallas, OR– a small project with a big impact in a rural community:

safe and supportive alcohol/drug free transitional housing for single parents and their kids; this kind of project is tough to do anywhere, but it’s a first in Polk County.

**Stepping Stone Award** - honoring an organization that improves the long-term situation of its residents/ community members through outstanding asset building programs. Winner:

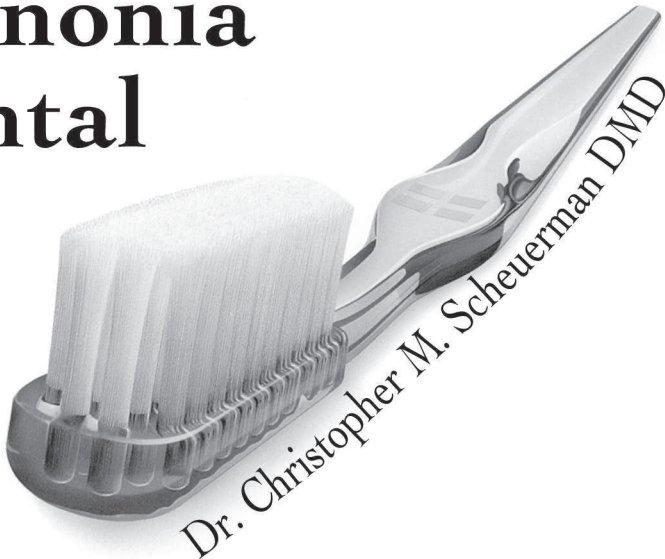
Central City Concern for their Employment Access Center, Portland, Oregon –serving and supporting some of the most challenging populations the industry serves:

- 7000 people per year are served
- Almost 60% are experiencing homelessness
- Over 60% are ex-offenders and/or are in recovery
- 23% are Veterans
- 38% are people of color
- Almost 3 out of 4 find employment, about ½ in full-time employment.


**Thrive and Shine Award** - honoring a program that effectively addresses the needs of low income families or individuals through stabilizing housing, supporting innovative solutions to family or neighborhood problems, or reaching under-served populations. Winner:

Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives (PCRI) for Thriving Families, Portland, Oregon – Uses an innovative, holistic approach to working with the whole family – parents and children – to develop a family strategic plan with performance goals, and to provide layers of support from PCRI programs.

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