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Local health clinic struggles to handle patient needs with decreased funding

By Polina Olsen
 The Southwest Portland Post

Anyone could understand the mother's anxiety but it came close to home for Southwest Community Health Center director Samira Godil. "I got a call from a mom whose son was diabetic," she told *The Post*. "They didn't have insurance and nobody was willing to take him. We saw him right away but it hit me so hard. Since my daughter is diabetic, I can feel the pain of others."

Unfortunately, Godil feels that pain all too often as the economic downturn increases demand for the center's services. Currently located in the Multnomah Center and open Tuesday and Thursday evenings and the second and fourth Monday evening of each month, the health center often books appointments three weeks out.

"We're definitely seeing an uptick," Godil said. The clinic has always served the working poor -- people whose employers don't offer health benefits or who cannot afford the premiums. "Now, we're also seeing middle class people who have lost their jobs and health insurance."

In addition, as demand rises, Godil

sees donations falter as the economic pinch affects even their most dedicated supporters. "Donations have gone down significantly just when need has gone up," she said. "Our individual donations are down about 50 percent this year. And, foundations are tougher, too, because their portfolios have gone down."

Godil got the idea for the health center while working as health coordinator for Neighborhood House. She quickly realized many families did not have medical insurance. With help from Dr. Lyle J. Fagnan of OHSU Gabriel Park, she started one-day free clinics. The first day drew more than 40 children. Clearly, this wasn't enough.

"In May 2000, I quit my job at Neighborhood House and put [the health center] together," she said. "Our scope initially was acute episodic -- simple colds, coughs, minor lacerations, urinary tract infections. Our goal was to plug the uninsured into the system but there is nowhere to send them so we started doing some chronic disease management. Diabetics, hypertension, and asthma are our top three."

In fact, current medical director Dr. Frank Dornfest pushed to expand services recognizing the patient's ongoing needs. The clinic provides diagnostic laboratory



Irina Kucherenko receives advise from Dr. Christina Milano (kneeling) as Susan Mournian, nurse coordinator, (seated at desk) checks the charts. (Post photo by Polina Olsen)

and imaging services through outsourced contractors and offers vouchers for prescription medicine. The all-volunteer physician staff from OHSU and Legacy Health System rotates shifts and come after working all day at their full-time jobs.

Most clients come from Southwest Portland; the top zip code is 97219. "When you look at the Southwest the average income is higher but there are pockets of poverty," Godil said. Many clients live

in Capitol Highway apartment blocks or in the Hillsdale Terrace or Slavin Court housing projects.

About 46 percent of patients are racial or ethnic minorities. "We have Russians, Hispanics, Vietnamese, Somalis, Kurdish, Middle Eastern, Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Croatian, Moldavian, Ukrainians -- lot of immigrants. We see a diverse clientele."

Despite support issues, the clinic hopes
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Citizen task force votes to replace Sellwood Bridge in current alignment

By Lee Perlman
 The Southwest Portland Post

The Sellwood Bridge Citizen Task Force has completed its task after two years, having recommended that Multnomah County build a new Sellwood bridge at the same location for approximately \$293 million and replacing the 1926 structure.

In the end the 20-person group came down to a choice between Alternatives D and E, and was heavily lobbied by people potentially impacted by the alignment they opposed.

Alternative D, which would be very close to the site of the existing bridge, would require removing four units from the Sellwood Harbor condominiums and one Unit in River Park.

Alternative E would swing north from

its Southeast Tacoma Street approach and land on the west side about a quarter mile north of the existing bridge span. It would avoid the impacts of Alignment D, and two other options, but create new ones of its own.

Alternative E would take out six residential units and two businesses at Grand Place and 37 commercial spaces at River Park Center. It would also come close to the Sellwood Riverfront Park and the Oaks Pioneer Church wedding chapel. How great this last impact would be was the subject of considerable debate at two public meetings last month.

At the first meeting, on January 5, the Task Force found itself lobbied heavily by residents of Sellwood Harbor and River Park, including Jim and Catherine Laprentier. They live in one of the Sellwood Harbor units to be removed.

Catherine Laprentier said she had been a neighborhood booster working to remove vagrants living beneath the bridge and to install a running track "so all of you can have access to the river." She accused County officials of skewing the issue by showing the E Alignment as having more than two lanes, playing to fears of a large bridge that would encourage commuting from Clackamas County and lead to the expansion of Southeast Tacoma Street.

Another condo owner, Barbara Sloop, a widow on a fixed income, said the recent loss of value for property from the economic downturn would not be a concern "as long as it's just on paper." It would, however, affect her ability to sell at a price that would allow her to find a new home. "For the last two years the furnace has been dying, and I've lived by the fire place, because I don't want to put a penny into a place I might have to sell."

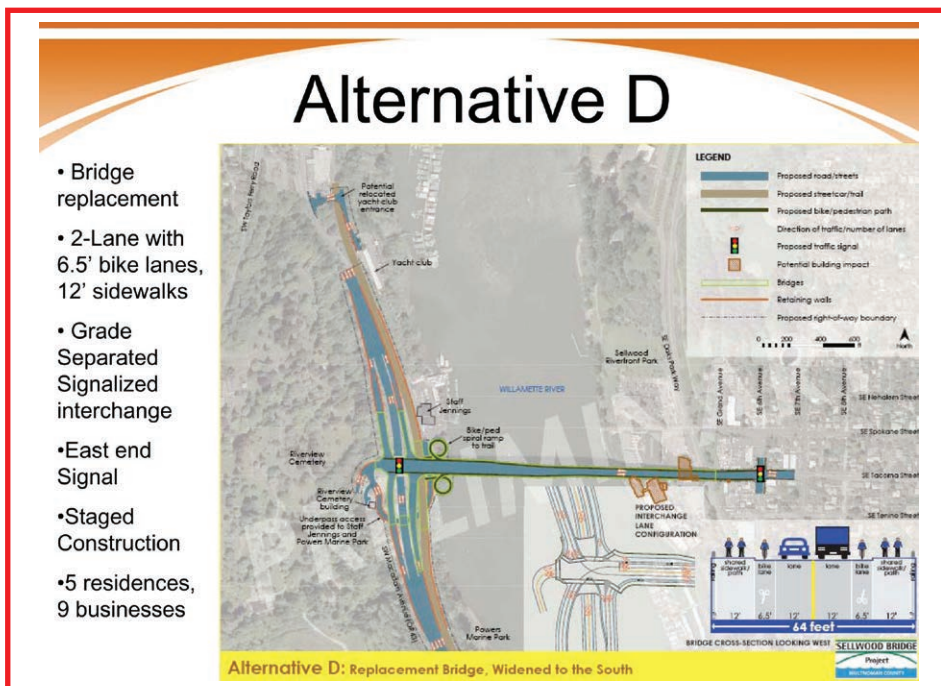
Yet another condo owner and widow, Kathleen Holahan, noted that she could not sell her unit and move now if she wanted to because no one would buy it with the cloud of possible condemnation hanging over it. "If Alignment D is picked and there's no financing, we'll be left in limbo," she said.

For this reason Jim Laprentier called on the county to either come up with a financing plan quickly or go with a No Build alternative, which would shore up deficiencies in the existing bridge enough to make it useable for the next 20 years. He argued that Alignment E would have "no serious impact" on the park or church.

The condominium owners dominated the testimony at the January 5 session, but found themselves badly outnumbered on January 19. Pat Hainley, chair of the Sellwood-Moreland Improvement League (SMILE), said that at a special meeting his board voted unanimously in favor of D, and that they would hold a march for it on January 31.

Phil Crane, a SMILE board member, spoke of the Springwater Corridor and other natural amenities of the area and said, "To have that corridor obstructed by a bridge flies in the face of all things sustainable." Lorraine Fyre, a former SMILE secretary, noted that revenue from Oaks Church functions goes to SMILE, and is used by them to operate Sellwood Station community center and functions such as their Sundae in the Park celebration.

"I don't think there's a soul in the neigh-
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(graphic courtesy of Mike Pullen, Multnomah County)

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