

## Lee County hospital certificate of need approved

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ALBANY -- The Georgia Department of Community Health has approved the certificate of need for a \$123 million, 60-bed hospital in Lee County.

Officials with Lee County have confirmed the CON was approved.

"In terms of quality of life and economic development, this is the best thing to happen in this part of the state in at least a decade," Winston Oxford, director of the Lee County Chamber of Commerce, said. There is an appeals period lasting 30 days, but officials still plan to move forward with infrastructure plans. Lee County Commissioner Rick Muggridge said a special called meeting is likely to be called in the next 24 hours to get that process started.

"We are just delighted," Muggridge said. "This is a long time coming."

Serving on the board for the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Muggridge said his knowledge of how state boards work made him feel confident that the state Department of Community Health would look at as a strong and complete application.

"This is going to make a real difference in real people's lives," he said.

The hospital had been opposed by the Dougherty County Commission, Crisp Regional Hospital in Cordele and Georgia Alliance of Community Hospitals, who made arguments against the approval before the DCH.

"If true it's very disappointing for Phoebe Putney and Dougherty County. The only one who can appeal is Crisp Regional because they are the only one who has legal standing in the matter." Monte Veazy, president/CEO of the alliance said.

The Dougherty County Commission opposed the facility because of the adverse affect the board said it would have on Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital in Albany.

"Well, that's that. The county has no legal standing. The one who does is Crisp Regional. Other than that I have nothing say." Spencer Lee, Dougherty County's attorney, said.

Phoebe and its parent, Phoebe Health System, were unable to oppose the CON because of an agreement with the Federal Trade Commission that allowed the Hospital Board of Albany-Dougherty County to keep the former Palmyra Medical Center in Albany that it had acquired. Phoebe now operates that facility as its north campus.

"Today's decision by the Department of Community Health is an important step in the Certificate of Need process, however, it is likely not the final step," Phoebe said in a statement. "The CON opposition has the right to appeal the decision."

"Throughout this process, Phoebe has abided by our voluntary consent agreement with the Federal Trade Commission, and we will continue to do so. We will not comment on the merits of the application or be involved in any way in a potential appeal."

The FTC, meanwhile, urged the state agency in a letter to approve the Lee County CON.

More details to come.