

**Mayor's column for
The Enterprise
For publication on 5/23/08**

The Edmonds City Council has recently taken an interest in the goings-on at Stevens Hospital. Whether you are a fan or a detractor of the hospital, most of your news probably comes from newspaper articles or City Council reruns. How is the average citizen supposed to know what really is going on at the public hospital?

Because everyone seems to be getting in on the act these days, I thought I'd throw in my two-cent's worth as well. I believe much of what is happening at Stevens is a result of past practices. Or maybe the lack of same.

Like any public facility, a hospital needs to be maintained; it needs to continually upgrade equipment; it needs to keep up with the times. Or it will fail to exist as a viable community asset. We may one day face the same problem with our City-owned facilities.

Management of the hospital, and the hospital commissioners, are now facing up to the challenges. That is their job, as distasteful and difficult as that may seem. They have only just begun. They need to explore every available option in an attempt to continue to provide quality healthcare services to the South County area. And I do mean "every" available option!

There are those who are critical of how management and the board are going about their business. I believe it's premature to criticize their efforts when they haven't even come up with options for the public to consider. On the surface it would seem that they have limited choices. They can continue down the path they are currently on and be out of business in three to five years. They can ask the public to support a very large bond issue. Or they can partner with another hospital to maintain service at the current location.

I read in the news that other hospitals have such an interest. I would think that the board should strike while the iron is hot, so to speak, and take advantage of the interest. Lay out your terms, demand a level of future service that the citizens of South County want, and strike a deal.

I don't pretend to know all the details of how such a deal could work, but I do know the voters' thoughts on additional taxes and on the prospects of losing hospital service. I believe a partnering effort would be well received by the taxpayers if it allowed for continued service.

So I urge the hospital commissioners to do the hard work required and expected of them to bring this crisis to a favorable conclusion. I ask them to work with the management staff of Stevens to form a team to solve the problem, not create a chasm between the board and management. A united front, working together and quickly, will serve the citizens of South County for many years to come.