



## Cherry Street Health Services eyes new low-income clinic on Wyoming's Burlingame Avenue

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**Matt Vande Bunte | The Grand Rapids Press**

WYOMING — A vacant car dealership soon may house a low-income health center as a once-thriving commercial strip continues to evolve.

Citing growing demand from northern Wyoming residents, Cherry Street Health Services seeks federal funding to open a clinic at 2929 Burlingame Ave. SW, the former home of Classic Chevrolet.

The Grand Rapids nonprofit's grant application comes as more area residents fall below the poverty line of \$22,050 for a family of four. The Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution earlier this year released data showing the poverty rate in Kent and three surrounding counties grew faster from 2000 to 2008 than any suburban region in the country.

"What they didn't show is that the rise in the poverty rate in the city of Wyoming was even higher than that. It really is a shift toward a poorer population," said Chris Shea, Cherry Street's executive director.

"As we look at where our patients come from, the need is especially great in the southwest Grand Rapids and northern Wyoming areas."

Cherry Street's grant proposal states Wyoming has had a 61-percent increase in the share of its populace living at or below double the poverty line, from 23 percent in 2000 to 37 percent in 2009. And one-third of Wyoming and southwest Grand Rapids residents are at or below the poverty line, it states.

Cherry Street provides medical, dental, vision and behavioral health services to about 50,000 people per year at 12 sites, 11 in Grand Rapids and one in Greenville, plus a traveling clinic that visits area schools. It wants to lease space at the Classic Chevrolet site in Wyoming and open a second new clinic on Kalamazoo Avenue SE between 28th and Burton streets, Shea said.

Cherry Street also is building a \$30 million Heart of the City Health Center, set to open next summer at the corner of Cherry Street and Sheldon Avenue in Grand Rapids.

Earl Clements, a real estate broker marketing the Classic Chevrolet site, said he could not comment on any interest from Cherry Street. He said a prospective buyer has made an offer on the property.

The proposed clinics initially would have a combined staff of 9.5, including one family-practice doctor, one physician

assistant, one dentist and one hygienist to serve an estimated 7,500 medical and 3,000 dental visits in the first year. Cherry Street expects just over 25 percent of the projected 2,400 patients will be homeless.

Shea said Cherry Street does not expect a response to its grant request until next summer, so the clinics would not open before next fall. There is not enough operational or capital funding to open the clinics without a federal grant, he said.

Wyoming City Council on Monday passed a resolution in support of Cherry Street's grant proposal, though the nonprofit clinic runs counter to the traditional development plan for 28th Street SW, or Wyoming Town Center.

But a new Turn On 28th Street vision emerging for Wyoming's downtown sees medical care as a key component of the corridor's future vitality.

"When you look at the Turn on 28th Street study, one of the recommendations is to diversify into medical facilities," said Barb VanDuren, deputy city manager and Downtown Development Authority director.

"We know there has to be some change on 28th Street. To support it with strictly retail probably will not happen."

The Turn On 28th Street process continues 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 6-8 p.m. Tuesday with public design workshops at the Wyoming branch of Kent District Library, 3350 Michael Ave. SW.

A consultant's initial design concept for the future of 28th Street SW was released last week. It envisions a new street arcing south of 28th from Burlingame to Clyde Park avenues, cutting the existing large commercial parcels into smaller urban blocks with pedestrian access and land-use diversity including retail stores, offices, housing and green space.

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