



The federal Indian Health Service plans to build a regional youth-treatment center in Yolo County, west of Davis. Courtesy graphic

### County Government

# Plans for youth treatment center moving ahead despite concerns over road safety

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy** From page A1 | June 28, 2017

WOODLAND — The Indian Health Service is moving forward with plans to build a regional youth-treatment center west of Davis even though funds are not available — and plans not in place — to make safety improvements on County Road 31 as recommended in a recent traffic safety study.

That study affirmed the need for a left-turn pocket for vehicles entering the facility from the eastbound lane of Road 31.

The road safety issue has been a concern to Yolo County supervisors since planning for the youth treatment facility got underway more than six years ago, along with concerns about flooding, drainage and the impact on ag land.

However, because the treatment facility is a federal project on federal land, local and state zoning and environmental laws don't apply, limiting the county's authority over the project.

Supervisors said they don't oppose the mission of a culturally appropriate substance abuse treatment center for American Indian and Alaska-native youths, and the 32-bed facility is expected to provide exactly that on 12 acres of D-Q University, a two-year tribal college that stopped offering classes in 2005.

However, funding for safety improvements to Road 31 was not included in Congressional appropriations for the treatment center when it was approved several years ago, as road safety was not identified as an issue in an environmental assessment.

The Board of Supervisors disagreed with that assessment in an October 2015 letter sent to the Indian Health Services following its release.

The letter cited the facility's location near a sharp curve in Road 31.

"Drivers would likely be unaware of cars stopped in the main traffic lane waiting to turn left into the center immediately after the curve," the letter stated. "In addition, County Road 31 is east-west facing, meaning that those traveling eastbound in the morning can be blinded by the rising sun ... unable to see cars stopped in the road wanting to turn into the facility.

"None of these considerations are taken into account in IHS' traffic analysis," the letter stated.

The estimated 70 employees who will be working at the facility — not to mention other visitors to the center — would add 180 trips per day, the letter said, and those trips "so close to the County Road 31 curve is likely to have an impact on traffic and increase accidents."

In response to the county's concerns, IHS conducted a second road safety study and determined that a left turn pocket on Road 31 was indeed needed. But where funds for such an improvement would come from is unclear. Congress is unlikely to appropriate additional funds, IHS representatives said, though other sources are a possibility, including grant funders and tribal partners.

During an update to the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, IHS representatives said they would continue working to come up with a solution, but also said work on the facility will move ahead regardless.

Construction is not expected to begin on the youth treatment center until June 2018, said Michael Weaver, director of the Division of Engineering Services at IHS, "so we've got a couple of years to deal with this before the facility is actually open."

But that didn't sit well with supervisors, who noted that projects that fall under their purview do not move ahead until all issues are addressed and resolved.

"If you were building a facility without the money to (add) the roof, would you go forward with it?" asked Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis.

"We understand this is not subject to our approval process," he said, later adding that, "We have a serious public safety issue which is life and death if there are accidents and, in my view, the facility should not be built if that's not addressed."

"It's not the way we would prefer to do it," acknowledged Weaver.

However he said, the project, which is already six years in the making, isn't getting any cheaper.

“The cost continues to escalate,” he said. “Construction costs, labor costs... are only going up. We really need to get this facility built with the money we have before our costs keep escalating.

“It will literally take an act of Congress (to get additional funding) and we don’t anticipate that’s going to happen.”

Supervisor Don Saylor of Davis said the county appreciates both the mission of the youth treatment facility as well as other benefits — including 70 jobs new jobs in Yolo County — but added that “I couldn’t in good conscience just be supportive at this point.”

“Less than a month ago, we had a traffic fatality less than a mile from this site,” he said, referring to a May rollover crash that killed a three-year-old from Winters.

Saylor added that he still has concerns related to flooding and drainage but the key issue remains “(what) happens to the roadway and public safety for our people.”

“I don’t think Yolo County residents would allow us to say, ‘Let’s just proceed.’”

Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland took his objections a step further, telling his colleagues “I would like the county to use every mechanism we have in place to prevent this (project)... I want to try to stop this.

“What options do we have?” he asked County Counsel Phil Pogledich.

Polgledich replied that he would discuss options with the board in closed session.

Meanwhile, Alec Tengolics, legislative and governmental affairs specialist with the county administrator’s office, said he will continue to look for other sources of funding for safety improvements on Road 31, as will Rep. John Garamendi’s office.

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