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Hospital's fitness center being turned into a YMCA

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CHESAPEAKE — There will still be a fitness center at 4626 Taylor Road in Western Branch, but it won't be owned by the city's hospital authority. On Friday, the authority voted to sell the facility to the YMCA of South Hampton Roads for \$6 million.

The sale of the Lifestyle Center in Western Branch is part of the hospital's plan to concentrate its resources on clinical and medical services, said Bob Oman, chairman of the Chesapeake

THE DEAL

Current center members will be given the choice of paying the same rates they have now through June 2007 or switching to the YMCA membership.

Hospital Authority's strategic planning and facilities committee. Running a fitness center was a diversion from that goal.

"We can't be all things to all people, much as we'd like to," Oman said.

Residents in the area have expressed worries in recent months that the center would close and the land be sold to a developer.

"I'm very pleased that we were able to do this," Oman said. "We're glad that we didn't have

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to make it condominiums, apartments or a shopping center.”

As part of the deal, the Lifestyle Center's staff will remain when the YMCA takes over July 1. Current center members will be given the choice of paying the same rates they have now through June 2007 or switching immediately to the YMCA membership, which would be cheaper in some cases and also give access to the organization's other facilities, said Terri Reedy, vice president of marketing and communications for the YMCA of South Hampton Roads.

The new YMCA will be open to children of all ages, while the Lifestyle Center membership is limited to ages 13 and older. The increased presence of children, whom some feared would be inadequately supervised, was a sticking point for several residents at a meeting with hospital and YMCA officials at the center Friday evening.

“We came here, a lot of us, for an adult facility with an adult atmosphere,” said Al Pendleton, a resident of nearby northern Suffolk.

The facility will open as a YMCA branch on July 4 and will include \$300,000 in new equipment. Other upgrades, including an outdoor pool, also are possible, Reedy said. “We're going to take good care of these people,” she said. “We have the resources to make it happen.”

The hospital authority hopes to reinvest money from the sale into clinical services, possibly in the Western Branch area, said Christopher Mosley,



president and chief executive officer of Chesapeake Health, which is overseen by the hospital authority.

“We're repositioning ourselves,” Mosley said. “We're now in a position to expand services.”

Chesapeake Health has proposed a diagnostic imaging center adjacent to the facility on Taylor Road, that, if approved by the state, would include CT and MRI services.

Pendleton, 54, said he believes the hospital authority has just given up a “gold mine,” given the rising number of aging baby boomers looking to get fit.

“I think they're making a wrong strategic decision,” he said. “We'll have to wait and see.”

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