

Mental Health Residence To Be Built in Brookings August 1, 2012

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<http://www.currypilot.com/News/Local-News/Mental-health-residence-to-be-built-in-Brookings>

Brookings will soon be home to five people working to improve their social skills, become independent and integrate themselves into the community. They are clients of ColumbiaCare Services, a Medford-based company specializing in developing and operating mental-health residential treatment programs in Oregon and Idaho. The residents are evaluated by the state Psychiatric Security Review Board or could have, except for their mental illness, been found guilty of a crime. "There is the notion out there that people with mental illness are in some way dangerous, that they are to be feared," said ColumbiaCare spokeswoman Jennifer Sewitsky. "Not only are they active in their recovery, there is a lot of supervision and care. It is a very responsible process." ColumbiaCare Services offers five types of residential treatment facilities, ranging from supportive and transitional housing – arguably the most minimal of security – to secure residential treatment facilities, which are locked to protect the community. The facility in Brookings falls on the less-restrictive end of the spectrum. "We look at where there is property, where there is support in the community," Sewitsky said of selecting Brookings. "This is where we landed and thought we could do a good job. We're really excited. We get to provide services to five individuals working at a high level of recovery, moving on and getting better." The Brookings home will be a state licensed, non-locked, community-based home, serving

five adults who receive treatment services and 24-hour care for their mental disability. The staff here will also tend to residents' physical disabilities. The firm tentatively plans to hire about 11 people, with two mental health professionals each on a morning and afternoon shift and one person at night. An administrator with a master's degree in mental health will be needed, as will nursing staff. ColumbiaCare plans to advertise and hire locally for those positions, Sewitsky said, noting that additional staff will be added if needed. "This will bring great things other than people getting things they deserve," Sewitsky said. It'll bring business to the community. We're buying property, hiring contractors and subcontractors, and will buy products and services as much as we can from the local area. Then, there's ongoing business, like groceries and gas; it's great for the economy." Curry County is already home to one residential treatment facility and one supportive and transitional facility, both in Gold Beach. Coos County has a residential treatment home that is most similar to that the firm will build here. "All of them are remarkable successes," Sewitsky said. "We make sure that they are. It behooves us, behooves the residents in their recovery and it behooves the community. This is a positive addition to the community." The residents are referred from the state and deemed to be at a level at which they are able to be integrated back into a community. They have yet to be selected, and Sewitsky said state law prohibits her from talking about individuals or their care. "People can't be kept at a higher level of care if they are in a place in their recovery where they don't meet that criteria," Sewitsky said. "These are people who have been deemed ready for a lower level of care; they're stepping down through the system." The firm submitted floor plans to the town for a 3,000-square-foot house it will erect on Cove Road behind Bi-Mart. It hopes to break ground in 30 to 60 days, Sewitsky said. The state of Oregon will provide 20 percent of the development costs, estimated to be between \$100,000 and \$150,000, and start-up costs to include features such as vans and furniture. The company will provide the remaining funds through private

funding and negotiate contracts for services. The firm received support from Curry County Board of Commissioners, the county Mental Health and Human Services director, Jefferson Behavioral Health Regional Mental Health Organization and Curry General Hospital. Residents in the area, might not know about – and could object to – having such facilities in their neighborhood. City Manager Gary Milliman said such a structure does not have to go through the planning department process, which could have further reduced the chances of people in the city knowing about it. “I think a similar facility was controversial in Milwaukie (Oregon) in 2009,” Milliman said. “Perhaps it took the community by surprise. But they have not had any issues there. The law provides for this type of facility in residential neighborhoods. He said he didn’t know if neighbors know ColumbiaCare is building a home here, and that the firm is not required to announce it or solicit response. Representatives will, however, likely hold an open house once it is established, Sewitsky said. “We have to balance being really good neighbors and providing services,” she said. “We are treating people with the belief that they can recover. They want to live in a community just like any other American in the country. And we are good neighbors. We have an excellent track record.”