

# Health department finds new home

by Dan Burke

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GALENA—The Jo Daviess County Health Department has found a new home, said Elizabeth Townsend, administrator.

Townsend said the department is in the process of purchasing property in Elizabeth and said the closing is expected to be completed in December. Townsend said the move will coincide with department plans to open a dental clinic next year in efforts to expand services.

Townsend said four properties were purchased at a total cost of \$265,000. None of the properties were for sale, but all property owners accepted offers made by the department, said Townsend, and that the owners knew the offers were by the health department. The four addresses that will be acquired by the department are 105 N. Madison St., 107 N. Madison St., 200 Myrtle St., and 206 Myrtle St.

The health department's current home at 9483 U.S. 20 in Galena is owned by the board of health,

said Townsend, who said there has been discussion about the county taking control of the property. Townsend said the board of health does not want to lease the property, that it has no interest in "being landlords."

There was discussion about building an addition at the current location, said Townsend, but that "the bigger discussion for us was to be centrally located" in the county.

"We're not moving for larger space," said Townsend. "We're buying enough property to expand if we need to."

Plans for the move have been in the works since May, said Townsend, and funding will come from the public health capital investment fund. According to the county's fiscal year 2017 budget, the fund is expected to have about \$1.1 million at the end of the fiscal year in November.

The new location will require construction, said Townsend, and that two existing homes will be demolished. When complete, the health department

can have a structure as large as 10,000 square feet. Townsend said there is an existing building at the new location that will be kept.

The health department performed a needs assessment earlier in the year which identified ways for the department to address community needs.

While mental health services was identified as the most pressing need, oral care was also shown to be lacking in the county. Townsend said due to budgetary constraints, the department decided to start a dental clinic before offering mental health services.

"I thought (dental services) was something the county could really use," said Townsend.

The dental clinic will initially have one full-time dentist, two full-time dental hygienists and a dental coordinator to help get the office up and running, said Townsend.

Townsend said the department is currently working to become an accredited health department, which is a step towards the ultimate goal of becoming

a Federally Qualified Healthcare Center (FQHC).

Townsend said the advantages of becoming a FQHC is the designation would put the health department in the same category as a hospital with regard to services.

The label would show that the department meets a required level of quality care, said Townsend, and would allow the health department to accept a wider range of reimbursement.

Townsend said she is excited to have a central location and looks forward to expanding services. Townsend also said the move is a chance for the health department to reintroduce itself to the community. Another goal, said Townsend, is for the department to become more self-sufficient.

Townsend said the project is in the beginning stages and the department just began looking for an architect and project manager.

The goal is to have the new location ready next fall for not only the health department, but also for the dental clinic.