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**New Hurdle Could Delay Morgan Memorial Groundbreaking**  
***Single intervener poses threat to hospital's future***

**Madison, GA** - Leaders at Morgan Memorial Hospital remain hopeful they will break ground on a replacement hospital later this year, despite a new development that could delay the project.

In December, MMH received approval on a \$35 million USDA loan and secured a historically low interest rate of 2.375 percent. The approval was thought to be one of the final hurdles for the project following a year of milestones that included donation of land, a successful fundraising campaign and the signing of a collaboration agreement with Piedmont Athens Regional, which will bring additional physicians to Morgan County once the new hospital is complete.

Yet, a new obstacle was recently introduced when Morgan County resident John Anton declared himself a registered intervener during a hearing on the Hospital Authority's loan and agreement with the county.

Anton, who was represented in court by local attorney Stephen Morris, did not debate the need for a new hospital or its economic feasibility but instead raised concerns about the county commissioner's votes and the length of the agreement.

"In the many public meetings and one-on-one discussions the Authority has had in the months—even years—spent preparing for this moment, Mr. Anton has never come forward to ask a question or share a concern," said Hospital Authority Chairman Terry Evans. "We are surprised and disappointed that someone who has not come to the Authority with any issues previously has now intervened in a legal matter in an effort to stop a new hospital from being built."

By stepping forward as an intervener, Anton has triggered a legal process that will require Judge Allison Burleson to review written briefs from both parties before rendering a ruling in early March. If the Judge rules in favor of the Hospital Authority, Anton has the right to appeal the ruling, which could delay the project and cost millions of dollars in additional expense.

According to Hospital Authority Member Butch Thompson, such a delay would come with a heavy price. In addition to potentially impacting the historically low interest rate the hospital secured on its USDA loan, the hospital would continue to operate in an out-of-date facility where maintenance costs are rising and there is no room to expand services.

“If Mr. Anton is successful in delaying, or worse, stopping construction of a new hospital, it will have a far-reaching and detrimental impact on our community,” said Thompson. “In addition to the very real financial impact a delay could cause, there is also the less tangible, but equally important, price we pay in the way of missed opportunity... no new jobs, no growth in economic impact, and no increased access to potentially life-saving services.

“We sincerely hope Mr. Anton will reconsider his actions and withdraw his intervention.”

In 2016, patients visited MMH more than 14,500 times. Of those visits, nearly 8,000 were through the facility’s emergency room. The facility is certified as a Level IV Trauma Center, Remote Treatment Stroke Center, and is accredited by The Joint Commission.

Independent analysis shows MMH currently generates a local economic impact of \$10.5 million annually. Once complete, this impact will grow to an estimated \$14.3 million annually and reach \$17 million annually in 10 years.

Evans said the county’s support of the hospital through its annual \$1 million subsidy would still be needed even if efforts to derail the project are successful. Those funds would support operations in its current location or, in the event of MMH’s closure, fund ambulance transportation to other hospitals.

“That money will either go to trying to maintain an aging, outdated hospital that opened its doors when Eisenhower was president, or it will be invested in a new facility that will serve us for generations to come. Obviously, the return on the investment is far greater with a new facility,” he says. “You can’t put a price on people’s lives and that’s ultimately what is at stake here.”