

Why a state psychiatric facility should remain in Caro

By Rep. Edward J. Canfield, D.O.

The state of Michigan is considering new locations for a regional psychiatric hospital. The search should be a short one, because the facility already is located in the best place it could be – Caro, which has welcomed it as a vital part of the community for more than 100 years.

What is now the Caro Center opened in 1914. With nearly 350 full-time employees, it is the second-largest employer in the Thumb's Tuscola County.

Moving it would devastate the county's economy, according to the Tuscola County Economic Development Corporation, to the tune of about \$53 million annually. Beyond that, the site simply makes the most sense for the state, its taxpayers, and -- most importantly -- the facility's patients and workers.

More than 80 percent of the center's patients come from a bordering county, or from the south and east within a reasonable driving distance. About a third of the facility's employees live within a Caro zip code. Over 70 percent of workers live within 30 miles of Caro Center.

Moving the facility to a more central geographic location within the region, which includes northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, would actually increase drive times for most patients' families and workers. The facility already is in a convenient location based on where its patients and employees live.

Caro Center should be allowed to partner with nearby Caro Community Hospital when patients need urgent or emergency medical treatment, which would add to the location's convenience.

The Caro location also is a winner when it comes to financial commonsense.

The state already owns its 650 acres connected to power, water and other services. A new on-site generator already is operational. An administration building already exists.

Even if the state decides some of the Caro Center's buildings are obsolete, the land and services are there to build new what must be built. It will not be done less expensively anywhere else.

This is a once-in-a-generation decision that Michigan must get right.

When we truly evaluate the people served at Caro Center, where their families and facility employees live, and the land and services available – the picture becomes clear. The best choice for all involved, including the state and its taxpayers, is to leave the center in Caro.

The Caro community has served patients for more than 100 years, and is prepared to continue that service for the next 100 years.

(Rep. Edward J. Canfield, D.O. represents Tuscola and Huron counties in the Michigan House.)