

Dear North Port Commissioners,

First, let me introduce myself. I am a retired hospital CEO who has resided in North Port for the last 10 years. I also sit on the audit committee of Sarasota Memorial Hospital. I am an experienced hospital executive, a past member and officer of the Maine Hospital Association, a registered nurse, a patient, and family member. My thoughts are designed to present some facts about why we may not have a hospital in our city yet, and to discourage us from wasting time and resources on things that have already been studied by others.

I do not think that Sarasota Memorial Hospital is competing directly against Venice Regional Bayfront Hospital, as been suggested by many. Both systems have planning boards and strategic planning committees that are paid to plan, and have come to somewhat similar conclusions as to need. As you know, Bayfront Venice has experienced some major quality issues that have resulted from the age of their plant and the inability to meet quality indicators. This has resulted in many things, including possible loss of payment from government entities unless corrected. Bayfront is also a for-profit system, that is part of a larger corporation that was once HCA; the system our current governor ran when they were sued for collecting huge amounts of money from fraudulent bills to Medicare and Medicaid. Though settled, Bayfront remains a for-profit entity that is responsible to its shareholders. The quality issues have also caused many doctors to leave the hospital, and to go to practice at Sarasota Memorial. Bayfront has come to the conclusion that building a new facility is far more practical than trying to renovate the existing facility, which is sound planning. Many of the doctors who practice in Sarasota and have left Bayfront due to the quality issues, still live in Venice. There is plenty of room for both facilities to exist and will give citizens a choice....well, some citizens. It is important to note that Bayfront accepts a very limited amount of indigent care, whereas Sarasota Memorial is a public hospital.

Sarasota Memorial is a not for profit hospital that is responsible to its constituents. It is a Magnet hospital, which only one percent of all hospitals in the country can claim. Having retired from a Magnet hospital, I can tell you that the rigorous standards it demands ascertain a quality of care that can be counted on and are second to none. The standards deal primarily with nursing care and nursing staffing, nurse satisfaction and physician-nurse relationships. It was the very reason that as soon as I moved here, I had no question where I would go for my care and that of my family. At that time, I read in the paper that nurses at the Bayfront hospitals surrounding this area were talking about striking, demanding better working conditions and better staffing. A non profit Magnet facility invests their profits in their plant and employees; a for profit invests its profit in its shareholders. Since staff are one of the biggest hospital expenses, less nursing staff means more money for shareholders This is generally more typical of the for profit hospitals that sacrifice staffing standards to make their profits.

The current plan for Bayfront is to rebuild their aged plant and decrease some beds. Sarasota's plan is to move some of their beds they are already staffing closer to North Port, and to add obstetric beds, which are sorely needed for our population. Though it would be nice to have those beds directly in our city, they will be equidistant from North Port and Sarasota. This will allow healthy babies to be born 20 minutes from North Port. It will allow another twenty minute drive to Sarasota Memorial for any infant born in distress, drug dependent, or with complications such as premature deliveries and maternal distress. Intensive care neonatal nurseries are a highly expensive endeavor and why you will rarely see them in Bayfront facilities. Duplication of these highly intensive services is not cost effective.

Most importantly you should know that much study was done by both entities on numerous demographics. This is what all businesses do before building..they study where they are going. Poor planning creates what happened with Uncle Maddio's pizza that opened in Cocoplum Villages. One more pizza place was unnecessary. Demographics show that North Port is a young town, a very young town. Young people do not go to the hospital or require a hospital level of care. The majority of their needs can be taken care of with walk in care centers, which are popping up everywhere in our city based on need. If you ask for the number of days occupied by 20-40 year olds in Venice or Sarasota (as was studied), you would find the number unable to support either hospital in Venice, much less North Port. Younger people however have children, and do take their children to the doctor. It is not a coincidence that out of the eight physicians that Sarasota hired to practice at our North Port facility, two remain. They are internists who are also pediatricians. The Doctors who moved their practices back to Venice and Sarasota said they were unable to build a practice here. The idea and strategic plan of Sarasota partnering with Johns Hopkins for a pediatric presence in this town is exactly what the demographics show is needed, and will build a pediatric physician base that will eventually be able to support hospital beds. Johns Hopkins is another premier institution that will bring obstetricians and pediatricians to our community as well as interns and residents in training. This is the excitement that should be focused on in North Port!

As to the 3.5 million in taxation we pay, I for one am more than happy to contribute my share to this hospital of excellence. Perhaps folks should understand Sarasota lost over 5 million dollars a year, the first years of operation here in North Port. That has reduced the past year as services have become more efficient, and as they have expanded outpatient services. It is our tax money that helps support this precious community resource.

People do already have other choices of hospitals in our area, but to my point, the short distance to one of them does not assure the level of care that Sarasota does. Most of these are owned by Bayfront and I can assure you if Bayfront thought North Port a desirable place to build, they would already be here. They know the majority of hospital days are spent with older patients in the beds, mostly Medicare, who continue to be one of the best payers in our convoluted reimbursement system. There seems to be some notion that we can choose for a hospital to come here. I can assure you that Certificate of Need or not, whoever eventually comes here will choose US because it is a wise business decision, not based on desire. No entity has chosen that yet.

From my understanding it will be several more years before there will be a hospital here. A pediatric hospital will undoubtedly come first, with beds added as our population begins to age. I am in hopes we begin to add more outpatient services, diagnostic capabilities, radiology, cardiac monitoring, and many other services most of us travel to Venice or Sarasota to receive. This would build the infrastructure to support physician's practices that is sorely needed. When I attend the strategic planning meeting at Sarasota Memorial in June these are things I will be looking for...how can we provide needed outpatient services and infrastructure that can eventually support physician practices and eventually hospital level of care? I will be happy to share with this commission those future strategic planning thoughts.

My belief is all of us need Sarasota Memorial, as they continue to be the preferred provider of services to this county. They will expand as economics, their feasibility studies, and demographics allow them to. Supporting their growth is something I wholeheartedly agree with. Forming a task force to restudy the issues, I do not support. Thank you for your time.

Dorothy E Hill
941-876-4684