

June 10, 2024

IL Health Facilities & Services Review Board
Attn: Debra Savage, Chairwoman
525 West Jefferson, 2nd Floor
Springfield, IL 62761

RE: Opposition Letter for OSF St. Elizabeth Medical Center – Replacement hospital (CON Project #24-011); &
Opposition Letter for OSF St. Elizabeth Medical Center – Discontinuation of facility (CON Project #24-013)

Dear Chairwoman:

I am writing to you in opposition of OSF's plans to discontinue services at St. Elizabeth Medical Center ("SEMC") in Ottawa, and in opposition of OSF's plans to demolish the hospital and build a newer, smaller facility that greatly reduces access to inpatient hospital services. Ottawa has had a full-service community hospital since 1895 and it's taken only 12 years for OSF to try and dismantle what we've built here for more than a century.

In 1895 a hospital was gifted to the city of Ottawa by a grieving widow in honor of her late husband, a local physician. In 1969 a local foundation donated 30 acres of land along the beautiful Fox River to build a new hospital; numerous individual and local corporate donations were collected to build the facility and ground was broken in 1971; the hospital was operational by 1974. In 1985 more land adjacent to the hospital was donated and multiple outpatient facilities were built. The hospital's board of directors were distinguished members of the community. The hospital is currently 99 beds in size (54 medical/surgical; 5 intensive care; 14 OB/delivery; and 26 acute mental illness).

Following years of partnership with OSF through the stroke network, Ottawa signed an LOI in 2010 to merge with OSF; and the deal was finalized in 2012 (See 2012's Certificate of Exemption Application E-001-12 for more detail). **OSF paid no purchase price for the hospital's assets (including the land), but the valuation at the time was \$58 million.**

In early 2023, two hospitals out of the five remaining in our planning region C-02 closed abruptly; one in Peru (49 beds) and one Spring Valley (44 beds) - both part of the now defunct SMP health system. In July 2023 OSF purchased the closed Peru hospital for \$38 million, **making OSF the only provider of hospital services in planning region C-02; a monopoly created *seemingly* by happenstance.**

In March 2024, OSF announced plans to build a new hospital in Ottawa and demolish the one built in the 70s. The new hospital would keep 26 mental health beds; but the 5-bed ICU and 14-bed OB units would be eliminated; and only 12 med/surg beds would remain (a 78% reduction from the 54 it has today). In stark contrast, OSF shared plans to re-open Peru's once shuttered hospital as the system's new inpatient hub on I-80, and increase the number of beds. **Even with OSF re-opening the Peru hospital with an increase in beds, the severe reduction planned for SEMC-Ottawa still leaves the C-02 region short 24 med/surg beds and 2 OB beds, and will place all ICU beds West of I-39 - leaving a gaping hole in access in LaSalle County.**

Confusing things even further is the fact that SEMC recently received an “A” rating from Leapfrog Group - a leader in providing transparency around patient safety and quality metrics. This puts them in the same company as University of Chicago Medical Center, Rush University Medical Center, Northwestern Central DuPage, Elmhurst Hospital and Silver Cross Hospital, among others. In both 2022 and -23, Ottawa was designated as a “Top 100 Rural & Community Hospital in the Country” by The Chartis Center for Rural Health, the industry's most comprehensive and objective assessment of rural hospital performance. It was one of only 3 rural hospitals in Illinois to receive the distinction in 2023. SEMC-Ottawa’s maternity unit is a Blue Cross Blue Shield Center of Distinction, proving it to be a high-quality department.

Since Ottawa was the first hospital OSF acquired in planning region C-02, there is no talk of the “I-80 corridor” in their agreement with our community. Rather, there is a lot of language around preserving Ottawa’s history and creating a sustainable health care delivery system here in Ottawa. For example, OSF stated in that application that, ***“access for the Ottawa community will benefit by the OSF affiliation as there will be no decrease in service scope or levels of care currently provided. Rather, it’s anticipated the affiliation will support an increased clinical program scope. OSF certifies that the affiliation will not result in restricting patient admissions and that Ottawa’s admissions policies will not become more restrictive.”***

An operational concern is the fact that OSF’s plans will rely on regular transports and additional police presence – using tax payer funded resources that benefit a non-tax paying organization. 24 is the Average Daily Census at SEMC today in the med/surg unit (peak census is 36) and they have planned for only 12 med/surg beds in the new facility. The math speaks for itself in terms of transports and the additional burden that will be placed on Ottawa’s ambulance services. And at any given time there are 4-6 police officers on patrol in Ottawa. Last year there were 67 calls to the hospital, which took 2-3 officers to respond to (1-3 hours per call). OSF plans to grow mental health services so those resources will be in even shorter supply.

Please vote against OSF’s projects to demolish our hospital in Ottawa and replace it with a smaller facility that eliminates our ICU and OB units, and severely reduces our medical surgical unit to one of the smallest in the state. OSF’s plans do not align with the growth in our area – both traditional residential and also through tourism as Heritage Harbor looks to build 300 vacation homes. OSF’s plans also do not align with the promises they made to our community 12 short years ago – and the promises stated in their exemption application to the IHFSRB.

It is our hope that OSF takes the time to make a better plan for our hospital, one that is right-sized for our community’s needs and honors the spirit of the partnership we entered into with their system and our local hospital.

Thank you,

John Nevins
Fire Chief – Village of Naplate Fire Department