

FROM:

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TO:

Health Services and Review Board

Attn: Debra Savage

525 W Jefferson St. 2nd Floor

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RE: Decision to moved ahead or reject OSF Health System's  
Proposal for LaSalle County hospital/health services

POSITION: Opposition

I am writing today as someone born in the Ottawa hospital, someone with generations of family residing there since the 1830s, and one who still has many friends in town. I hope I can be a voice for these concerned, upset friends today.

It seems inconceivable, but a sign of our times, that unelected health care officials not from Ottawa IL, the OSF executive planning administration, can envision & propose a plan to devastate a profitable, well-reviewed community hospital that has been built from generous local philanthropy and community support & fundraising in portions of three centuries. The plan will not just devastate immediate health

care, but consider that the physicians, nurses, & support staff who, while serving in medicine, have also served as community leaders in Ottawa IL. Will they all want to sacrifice an hour or more of time each day to drive back & forth to their new place of work? Likely not. They will locate closer to the proposed new center of employment, sucking much vitality from Ottawa, the county seat. The OSF proposal, not vetted by the leadership of Ottawa prior to announcing such proposal, is a plan to grab the meat & potatoes of health care for one community (LaSalle/Peru) while leaving the chicken feet for the last one to get a portion (Ottawa).

What about the environmental & immediate care aspects of demolishing the St. Elizabeth (formerly Ottawa Community) hospital? Most one way trips to the proposed new location will entail at least 30 minutes. Does the Review Board realize there are times that traffic is backed up for miles on both I-80 and Rt.6 due to throngs of Starved Rock State Park visitors? The cost to patients and families per trip is 2 gallons of gas, more highway congestion and pollution for decades to come and a 1+ hour (at least) of commuting time. The commute will inevitably lead to more babies born in vehicles, more heart attack and stroke patients deprived of immediate care that could spell severe disability or death.

Then there is the First Responder tax issue. How many more EMTs and vehicles will be needed in Ottawa when their hospital is demolished? How many more social workers

and police will be needed when a large psychiatric ward is located in Ottawa? Why should one community have to bear the burden of more taxes for services to replace what will be lost?

Why pick winners and losers? If specialization for certain common medical reasons is deemed important, why shouldn't OSF instead create a digital state-of-the-art health portal for non-emergency maladies for which physician consulting through video visits could be performed? Isn't that the kind of 21st Century digital outcome that could reduce costs & improve services as we have been promised? Wouldn't that be a win? Why set one community's health care convenience (LaSalle/Peru) over another's (Ottawa)? Will specialization & consolidation of services in chiefly one location guarantee more responsiveness & better outcomes?

And what is to become of the flattened Ottawa St. Elizabeth hospital site on the oxbow of the Fox River, a site generously donated for Ottawa's health care needs? Perhaps luxury condos to fund the improvements needed for the proposed Peru regional hospital?

So many unanswered questions. So much on the line for the town coerced to give up a precious part of its identity as a self-sufficient community.

And so many people in Ottawa incredulous, frustrated, angered, and saddened as never before that the trust offered

a decade ago to the Order of St. Francis Health Care to manage & shepherd their lovely, home-grown, community hospital could turn in just a few years to abject betrayal. What a sad & revealing chapter in our rush to believe bigger is always better, the Walmartization of health care.

I ask the Board of Review to prayerfully consider their crucial role in the vitality of all Illinois rural communities. I ask that you would vote to REJECT the lopsided OSF regional hospital proposal. REJECT the proposal that will be an unwanted, devastating blow to the vitality of Ottawa, IL its citizens and constituents, and institutions.

Instead, advocate for a new proposal that involves leaders from all communities and empowers collaboration, creative thinking, community cooperation and digital solutions so that local health care in both communities and the LaSalle County area wins.

Your thoughtful, reasoned consideration is sought for a time such as this.

Respectfully,  
Eve Gonigam Kirk