

## Va. Hospital Center kicks off \$250M expansion project

By Scott McCaffrey

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*Virginia Hospital Center vice presidents Adrian Stanton and Charles Fletcher on Sept. 13, 2019, stand in front of construction work aimed at demolishing facilities on the North Edison Street parcel the hospital plans to use for expansion. The effort should run three years.*

Shovels are in the ground and buildings are coming down as Virginia Hospital Center embarks on the nitty-gritty of a three-year, quarter-billion-dollar expansion effort.

“It’s like construction surgical work,” Charles Fletcher, the hospital’s vice president of support services, said as he walked through the construction site, which ultimately will be transformed into the largest upgrade of hospital facilities in a generation.

The hospital earlier this year inked a land swap with the Arlington County government, gaining control of county-owned land just north of the existing hospital campus on North George Mason Drive. The Edison Street site, as it is known, had been home to a collection of antiquated public-health buildings that are being razed to make way for the \$250 million hospital expansion.

With construction under way, the feeling of hospital officials is: So far, so good.

“It’s been pretty normal, pretty boring,” hospital corporate-communications director Maryanne Boster said as she toured the nascent stages of construction with Fletcher and hospital marketing chief Adrian Stanton on Sept. 13.

A formal groundbreaking ceremony is slated for Oct. 22, but work already is moving quickly – five former county-government buildings are being demolished and utilities are being upgraded and placed underground.

It’s all part of a development master plan, and “you just have to go through the process” a step at a time, Stanton said.

The hospital’s roots date to the early 1940s, although the oldest fixture on the current campus is the power plant, dating from the 1950s. The last major expansion of facilities came almost 20 years ago.

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The first phase of the current project slated to be completed is a parking garage, expected to come on line in the third quarter of 2021. An outpatient center should open about a year later, along with a variety of public amenities agreed to during the development-approval process; about 1.2 acres of the 5.5-acre parcel will be maintained as green space.

As part of the land swap, the hospital deeded to the county government an 11.6-acre tract along South Carlin Springs Road, and handed over \$4.7 million in cash. The hospital is leasing back the Carlin Springs parcel from the county government through the end of the year, as it works toward moving facilities currently located there to new spaces.

“We’ve identified a home for everybody,” from an urgent-care facility to the Arlington Pediatric Center, Stanton said.

Hospital leaders long had coveted acquisition of the North Edison Street site in order to expand the current land-locked campus. (Ironically, the Edison Street parcel once was owned by the hospital, but was sold to the county government years ago on the theory it would not be needed.)

The road to kickoff of construction wasn’t always smooth, as leaders of surrounding neighborhoods voiced a series of objections, but County Board members in May voted 5-0 to approve the land swap. Months before, the development plan had won County Board approval, but on a more narrow 3-2 vote.

Hospital officials are meeting monthly with the leaders of the surrounding civic associations – Langston, Tara-Leeway Heights and Waycroft-Woodlawn – to keep lines of communications open as the construction phase ramps up. The hospital already has picked up approval from state regulators for the facilities it plans to add.

As for the Carlin Springs parcel, the county government is evaluating options for its use.