

Here's the latest on Virginia Hospital Center's expansion, now underway

Sara Gilgore

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Virginia Hospital Center is finally breaking ground on its long-awaited expansion.

The project, which brings an outpatient pavilion and parking garage to the growing hospital, frees up space at the existing 357-bed facility now operating at capacity. The new medical building will house VHC's outpatient services — surgery, imaging, pharmacy, lab, endoscopy, physical therapy and offices — currently running in the main hospital building.

The garage is up first, on track to be completed by the end of 2021, and the pavilion will follow, slated to deliver by the end of 2022. Initial site work started in August with the demolition of old buildings before starting construction, said Adrian Stanton, VHC's vice president of business development and community relations. It "gets us closer to what we're hoping to accomplish with regard to making it more accessible to our patients and, frankly, giving us the ability to continue to grow," Stanton said, "because right now we're struggling to have the capacity to meet the current needs of the communities we serve."

Then there's the backfill project: Once construction finishes, the hospital will move its outpatient services to the new facility, to carve out room for more inpatient care in the main hospital, Stanton said. "It is allowing us to expand much-needed inpatient services, which is everything from medical-surgical beds to mental health expansion to expansion of the emergency department."

The project will also bring more inpatient beds. VHC has regulatory approval to add 44 beds, which will live on one level of the existing tower. It plans to seek approval through Virginia's Certificate of Public Need process for another 44 beds, to fill up a second floor of that building. Ultimately, the hospital still plans to grow by 100 beds total, to be able to treat more patients and cut down wait times.

"We hope we'll get a state approval for additional capacity when the time is right," Stanton said.

A groundbreaking ceremony Tuesday marks nearly a year since the Arlington County Board just barely awarded the project its critical green light, after community pushback and a deferred decision in the months leading up to the vote. That approval formalized a land-swap agreement between VHC and the county, a deal vital to the \$250 million campus expansion.

Under that deal, approved in mid-May, VHC took ownership of 1800 N. Edison St. for \$13.86 million, where it's locating the new pavilion. It then turned over an urgent care center at 601 South Carlin Springs Road to the county for \$9.2 million, with a \$4.66 million difference going toward the county's fiscal 2020 budget.

But VHC is still leasing a portion of the Carlin Springs property, to continue running its urgent care center and other services that have operated there, until it's able to move to them to new locations. And it has identified those future sites, according to Stanton. The pediatric clinic will move to the corner of South Glebe Road and Columbia Pike, urgent care will relocate to a building now under renovation off of 23rd Street in Crystal City, and administrative offices will move to a building in Shirlington where VHC already occupies space. Remaining clinical operations, including rehabilitation and diabetes programs, will move back to the VHC campus. All are scheduled to move to their new locations by year's end, with a quick transition, Stanton said, "so that we don't have any downtime as far as service."