

October 25, 2015

E-017-15

Courtney Avery, Administrator
Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board
525 W. Jefferson St., 2nd Floor
Springfield, Illinois 62761

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OCT 28 2015

HEALTH FACILITIES &
SERVICES REVIEW BOARD

Dear Ms Avery:

I am writing to oppose the proposed closure of St Mary's Hospital in Streator, Il. I was in stunned disbelief when I first heard the news. It was just a year ago when OSF took a hospital under its wings in Mendota, Il.. A city of 7,400 people in northern LaSalle County with demographics very similar to Streator as noted in a newspaper article. After taking ownership of the Mendota hospital, OSF chose to keep it an inpatient facility despite several other nearby hospitals that were also inpatient. Meanwhile, Streator faces the proposal to close its hospital including inpatient services, forcing our 20,000 plus population base residing in the 61364 zip code area to travel 19 miles to the nearest hospital regardless of rain, sleet, snow or tornado watches.

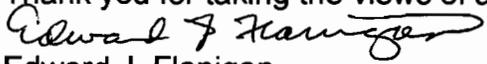
The Friends of St. Mary's Hospital Foundation has worked tirelessly to raise funds for the benefit of the healthcare of our local residents. Recent newspaper reports have stated the monies in excess of 2.7 million dollars will remain in Streator. Perhaps those monies as well as the funds needed to build a new outpatient facility could be used to fund programs to recruit new physicians to our area. Two of our area cities have budgeted monies for lobbyists in Springfield to look out for the needs of their communities and perhaps the time has come to hire a lobbyist to oversee the healthcare changes and how best to assist our Streatorland needs.

Economic development is already a struggle in the state of Illinois. We need a hospital to maintain competitiveness. Our local officials are doing their part to address this but need a viable healthcare partnership to achieve this. An annual trade show featuring Streator made products has been underway for a couple years and continues to improve while making Illinois governmental bodies aware of these Streator, Illinois manufacturers and thereby increasing orders which positively affects the work force.

We continue to market our Enterprise Zone and Tax Increment Financing district while pursuing new TIF districts at the present time. Our city has also begun to reach out to start-up businesses with a site obtained for a business incubator.

Streator, Illinois has a well maintained, well built hospital which also provides both inpatient same day surgery and outpatient services, that only needs proper management and direction to serve us well into the next century. Minutes matter in the proper health care of our area residents, many of them are senior citizens whose survival now rests with your impending decisions.

Thank you for taking the views of a citizen into your consideration.


Edward J. Flanigan
403 Michael Street, Streator, Illinois 61364

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Vogel: St. Mary's closing gives Streator another challenge

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I've always admired Streator's chin-up attitude that's helped it roll with the many punches time and circumstances have thrown its way. It's been a decades-long struggle. And now Streator seems about to lose its hospital.

Here's a community that's surrounded by, but not very close to, three interstate highways; that Amtrak abandoned nearly 20 years ago; and that's lost a fifth of its population from its peak of about 17,000 in the 1960s. Its school districts are drowning in red ink. Its glass manufacturing plant that once employed 3,500 now has 200 workers. And pending next Thursday's public hearing before the state's Health Facilities and Services Review Board, St. Mary's Hospital, a major employer, is set to close in 72 days.

Streator is a 180-proof blue-collar town. Scot Wrighton, who began his second tour as Streator's city manager last January, says "I spent almost seven years here (as the first city manager, beginning in 1987) and came to really care for this town. People can achieve things here through their own grit and determination."

So he was lured back, after serving as city manager of Kirksville, Mo., on the University of Georgia faculty, and seven years as manager of a private city development in India. Yes, that's right: not Indiana — India.

Streator's DNA seems to contain both resilience and initiative. As a NASA spacecraft flew beyond Pluto after a nine-year, 3 billion mile journey, Streator drew national attention with a yearlong salute to native son Clyde Tombaugh, the planet's discoverer. When Streator resident Gene McMullen's pumpkin weighed in at 2,145 pounds, we all knew it was, at that moment, considered the world's biggest.

But there are meat-and-potatoes things going on, too. Like plans to fix some sewer problems and broaden the city's tax base by annexing some of the hundreds of homes and 7,000 people who live in Streator's ZIP code but not in the city. Like economic development incentives. Like remodeling city hall. A downtown whose heart still beats.

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Wrighton and other city leaders say Hospital Sisters Health System (HSHS) has mismanaged the hospital, and they criticize the Peoria Catholic Diocese for, in essence, freezing out potential new operators, smoothing the way for another Catholic organization, OSF Healthcare, to replace the hospital with a 24-hour urgent care clinic that would send patients to OSF hospitals in Pontiac, Bloomington, Ottawa and Peoria.

Wrighton thinks HSHS was hell-bent on exiting Streator and not caring about the implications. But he also recognizes how technology and other forces are changing health care, making small-town hospitals irrelevant.

"In the 1960s, health care providers got paid for putting you in the hospital," he says. "Now they get paid for keeping you out of the hospital and making you well at the same time."

So, Streator leaders are characteristically putting the best face on St. Mary's likely closing, suggesting their town can be a template for what rural health care in America should be.

"We'd rather have Streator at the head of the pack than at the trailing end," Wrighton told a community gathering. "Streator has been a testing ground, a source of innovation and entrepreneurship before, so I believe Streator is more than equal to the challenge."

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