

November 2022

## A COMMUNITY CALL TO ACTION

In this post COVID period, South County Hospital is grappling with sustaining our mission to be *Your Most Trusted Health Partner*. All Rhode Island healthcare systems are facing the same challenges: State-regulated reimbursements that are 20% - 30% lower relative to Connecticut and Massachusetts for similar procedures, the resultant is a lack of providers to practice in RI and double digit increases in operating costs driven by rising labor costs to ensure the maintenance of our quality caregivers. Healthcare in Rhode Island is a tough business.

At the same time, COVID laid bare the scourge of the behavioral health epidemic. Because Washington County has the highest suicide rate of Rhode Island's five counties, South County Health is on the front line of this crisis. Our upgraded 15-bed emergency department is routinely addressing between 5 to 10 mental health/addiction related cases at any one time – provided without appropriate compensation because we are not state certified to treat behavioral health.

Throughout the pandemic, on the strength of our staff's dedication, we soldiered through, addressing incoming COVID cases. Our 100-bed community hospital, as the only birthing center in Washington County, kept the doors open and lights on. Even through the crisis, with philanthropic support, we invested millions of dollars in our Cancer Center to provide local state-of-the-art radiation and oncology services. Previous investment in seven operating rooms and robotic technology allowed SCH to deliver market leading results in orthopedics, urology, cardiovascular, endoscopy and surgical care. Through it all, South County Health maintained Medicare's Double 5-star ratings in Patient Satisfaction and Quality – one of only 19 hospitals in the nation and the only one in New England to be so awarded. Recently, SCH's Patient Safety Leapfrog 'A' grade was reaffirmed – one of only three hospitals in the state so rated.

Our commitment to the community has not wavered.

But now, we need you.

To be able to fund loss-making services that are mission critical, SCH has successfully developed and grown other service lines that subsidize these losses. This growth – which has attracted physicians, increased front line staff employment and drawn patients beyond our primary geographic footprint – requires larger grounds.

Consistent with previous expansion demands in which the Hospital and the Town of South Kingstown collaborated for the community's well-being, we have worked with the

Town to acquire and integrate the adjoining 2-acre Town Farm Park property into the Hospital's campus. Based on earlier precedent, the Hospital is prepared to acquire and transfer to the Town a 35-acre parcel in South Kingstown in return for the Town Farm Park. This "land swap" was approved by the Town Council in January 2020 to be submitted to the National Park Service (who has an easement on the Town Farm Park) for their approval. Once National Park Service approval is obtained, specific plans would come back to the South Kingstown Town Council for their assent.

Earlier in November, the South Kingstown Planning Board approved the Hospital's 5-year Institutional Master Plan that included provisions for Town Farm Park "land swap". This space would incorporate appropriate parking for patients and staff, a community gathering space including a playground and a therapeutic walking path that would wind along the Hospital's property allowing for water views. As a part of this process, SCH has shared our conceptual plans with neighbors and solicited their input, modifying the initial design to address function, noise and lighting concerns. Understandably, there is neighborhood apprehension about this expansion. The Hospital has pledged repeatedly to mitigate impacts on neighbors and honor the archeological value of the site for what we believe to be an essential asset to ensure our future. We want to be a good neighbor.

The newly elected South Kingstown Town Council will soon weigh in and we are hopeful that the value of a thriving South County Hospital will lead to consummation of the "land swap" in the near future.

We ask that you endorse the "land swap" and share your backing for the future of South County Health directly with members of the South Kingstown Town Council. If it be more convenient for you, please stop by the Hospital and sign a supportive petition on behalf of this effort in our main reception area.

Because you only miss Hospital services when you need them and they are not available.

Thank you for your support.



**Joseph F. Matthews**

Chair, Board of Trustees  
South County Health